# Irish Grassland Association

Members' Information Booklet

Issue No. 46 December 2020

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



## **CORPORATE MEMBERS 2020**

Irish Grassland Association

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## Editorial



Matt O'Keeffe Editor and IGA Council Member

Welcome to the IGA Winter 2020 Information Booklet as we continue to be challenged by Covid restrictions. While farming and food production have continued through this viral epidemic, farmers and their families have been affected, like all other members of our society, by health issues, travel and social distancing restrictions and, in many cases, off-farm work disruption. At the best of times farming can be a socially isolated occupation. This fact has been exacerbated during 2020. We must continue to look out for our relations, friends and fellow farmers through whatever means of communication are open to us.

This booklet reflects on how we managed to continue to interact with members through more novel means. The Internet has been a boon in this regard, at least facilitating the flow of information and knowledge which would normally be achieved through physical events held on farms around the country. We must hope that we can return to that level

#### SUGGESTIONS & FEEDBACK PLEASE!

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

of social interaction as soon as possible. It is certain that some of our newly introduced means of communication will feature in the IGA's future interactions with members.

Our front page is a photo selected from a range of photographs submitted by students who would normally attend our annual student conference. We thank and congratulate all those who participated and wish all students well in their studies, particularly during this stressful time.

Please note the alternative arrangements for our Annual Dairy Conference in the New Year. It will not be possible on this occasion to offer the normal physical presence that is such an important aspect of the IGA Dairy Conference. Nevertheless, we have assembled a strong panel of speakers and topics as is always the case. Please participate to the greatest extent possible.

In the following pages, we have reviews of our most recent events as well as advisory articles and farmers profiles.. We include an Archive biography of the late Joe Bruton, a former president of the Irish Grassland Association and a very significant presence in Irish agriculture for many years. The Editorial Committee thanks everyone who contributed to this Information Booklet.

Finally, we thank you for your continued support and wish you well in the coming year.

Matt O' Keeffe Editor IGA publications.



# Irish Grassland Association

Maura Callery

The 2020 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) took place on Thursday 15th September. Because of the restrictions on mass gatherings on foot of Covid 19, the AGM took the form of a very small physical meeting to comply with the governments restrictions in the Horse and Jockey Hotel and the remaining attendees jointed in via a live web link. A presentation of the year's activities was presented to all by the outgoing President Paul Hyland.

Paul Hyland thanked outgoing council members Pat Donnellan ICBF and Beef and Sheep Farmers Ronan Delany and Eddie Gavin on their outstanding contributions. Collectively they have given 15 years of commitment to the IGA council.



IGA Council Member for 6 years

and ICBF

Ronan Delaney IGA Council Member for 7 years Sheep and Beef Farmer



Eddie Gavin IGA Council Member for 2 years Sheep and Beef Farmer



Stan Lalor President IGA making a presentation to outgoing President Paul Hyland

He then welcomed the incoming President for 2020/21 Stan Lalor. Christy Watson was also announced as the new IGA Vice President.

Ed Payne, Niall Claffey and Vincent Griffith were deemed elected to council following a one year co opted term on the council and will now serve three years each. Matt O'Keeffe, Christy Watson and Mary McEvoy were all deemed re-elected onto the council after vacating their seats following a full term of 3 years, they will all serve a second three year term on council.

Stan Lalor, newly elected President, then welcomed his chosen co-opted members to strengthen his council during his presidential term. Alan Bohan Sheep Ireland, Tomás O'Leary Sheep and Beef Farmer and Finbarr Kiernan Veterinary Surgeon, Sheep and Dairy Farmer. They will all serve one year and will be eligible for election next year.

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

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the President and Council to thank everyone else involved in running our organisation. We want to applaud the speakers at our conferences, those who make generous contributions to our publications, our host families and our long-standing sponsors. We would also like to thank you, our loyal farming and corporate members for your overwhelming interest and continued support.



Stan Lalor newly installed President of the IGA

## Welcome to our new council members



Finbarr Kiernan is a veterinary surgeon.

His practice - Breffni Animal Care - is based in Cavan town. Finbarr regularly organises animal health seminars as part of his Beef Club and Sheep Club initiatives.

He has addressed IGA conferences on livestock health management practices. Finbarr has a particular focus on preventative animal health programmes and has particular expertise in the area of ruminant health.



sh Grassland Associ Council Member and Sheep Farmer

Tomas O' Leary lives outside Killarney Co. Kerry, is married to Eileen and has 3 children.

Tomas is traditionally a sheep and beef farmer. In recent years he has dropped the beef enterprise and now carries a 300 ewe flock and contract rears heifers for a dairy farmer.

In 2018 Tomas won the Grassland Sheep Farmer of the year category. Growing grass and the best utilisation of it has been a priority for him for many years . He is also a founding member of the Ring of Kerry Quality Lamb producer group and is their Treasurer and Procurement Officer.



Alan Bohan IGA Council Member and Sheep Ireland

Alan Bohan graduated from UCD with an Honours degree in Animal and Crop Production (B.Agr.Sc) in 2013 and started a PhD in Teagasc Moorepark in conjunction with UCD in the same year. The aim of his PhD was to develop a whole farm system bio-economic model for the Irish sheep industry to assess the main factors affecting the profitability of Irish sheep farms. Alan developed the Teagasc Lamb Production Model during his PhD which was used to assess the effect of lambing date, prolificacy and stocking rate on farm profit as well as calculating the economic value of traits for inclusion in the national genetic evaluations in collaboration with Sheep Ireland.

Upon completion of his PhD in 2017, Alan joined Teagasc as a Research Technologist on the SheepNet programme, a knowledge exchange programme involving stakeholders from 7 European countries.

Alan joined the Sheep Ireland Team in September 2019 where his work is focused on the continual improvement of sheep genetic evaluations and the continued increase in the uptake of €uro-Star evaluations by sheep farmers.

Alan is also sheep and beef farming in Co. Leitrim which keeps him in touch with the day to day challenges of farming and the key role grassland management plays in maintaining a profitable and sustainable farming enterprise.





and Teagasc



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IGA Council Member and Veterinary Practitioner



Matt O'Keeffe IGA Council Member IFM and Dairy Farmer



Thomas O'Connor IGA Council Member and Beef Farmer

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**IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION - MEMBERS' INFORMATION BOOKLET** 

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Niall Claffey IGA Council Member and Tradeforus



IGA Council Member ry Farmer and Aurivo Co C



## **IGA Virtual Sheep Event Review 2020**

Fiona McGovern IGA Council member and Teagasc

This year the IGA sheep farm walk supported by Mullinahone Co Op took on a different approach where the event was held virtually across our social media channels. Across three days in mid-August we re-visited three of our previous host farmers; William Hutchinson, Ned Morrissey and John Bell. Each day a series of video releases showcased each of our host farmers and gave an overview of their sheep enterprises with a focus on how their farming system has progressed since they previously hosted an IGA farm walk. Interactions from over 46,000 people throughout the three days emphasised the appreciation that we have for each of our host farmers and the work they put into running sheep enterprises, year in year out.



#### Ned Morrissey

Ned Morrissey, our 2015 host farmer, is farming with his family in Ballybrennock, Dunhill, Co. Waterford. Ned farms a mixed sheep and tillage enterprise on approximately 100 owned acres in addition to a further 500 rented acres, which is primarily used for tillage. There is a range of crops grown on the farm including winter barley, winter wheat, spring barley, spring wheat, fodder beet and maize, and these can alternate from year to year. The sheep enterprise, based on the 100 acre owned farm block, is run as a mid-season lamb production system. The flock consists of 450, mainly Suffolk X Belclare ewes, which lamb from mid-March onwards. Ned explained how outdoor lambing of his twin-bearing mature ewes works successfully on his farm and helps to reduce the overall labour requirement at lambing. Throughout the grazing season the main grassland area is stocked at 13 ewes/ha with a weaning rate of 1.6 lambs/ewe being regularly achieved. Grassland management is a top priority with a strong emphasis placed on utilising as much grass in the diet as possible. A paddock system and a planned reseeding programme, in conjunction with the inclusion of fodder beet, for ewes in mid-pregnancy, helps to maximise the use of grass on this farm. Ned introduced us to his son, Eamon, whom he has gone into partnership with in recent years and explained the importance for allowing the next generation to become more involved in the running of the farm.



#### John Bell

John Bell is farming on the outskirts of Castletown Geoghegan, Co. Westmeath and was the host of our 2017 IGA Sheep Farm Walk. Running a sheep only system based on 42 ha of grassland John manages a flock of 500 ewes and 140 replacements stocked at 14 ewes per hectare. With the high stocking rate on the farm good grassland management is at the forefront of John's system. With good levels of soil fertility, attention was turned to grazing infrastructure where John divided up the larger areas on the farm to create a paddock system. He explained to us the benefits of introducing a paddock grazing system and the return on both animal performance and total annual grass grown that he has seen since its introduction. Temporary fencing is also used during the main grazing season to achieve further grazing divisions. John has engineered an economical and farmer friendly way of creating these paddock divisions, using posts and reels, which he cleverly demonstrated to us. One of the key aspects of John's farming system is keeping things simple with an aim of making the farm labour efficient, as far as possible. Whether it's the feeding of ewes in late pregnancy, lambing, drenching or the weighing of lambs throughout the season John isn't afraid to ask for help when it's needed and believes in being organised in advance in order to make the most of people's time when getting big jobs done on the farm. As they say: 'Fail to prepare and prepare to fail'!

#### William Hutchinson

Farming in Kells, Co. Kilkenny, 2011 Host Farmer, William Hutchinson and his family, farm 120 ha of owned land with a further 27 ha leased in an adjoining block. Since 2012, there have been two major changes to the farm system. The move towards the Easycare breed and the introduction of dairy heifer contract rearing. William lambs approximately 550 ewes plus 150 ewe lambs in a combined commercial and pedigree sheep system. The videos released throughout the day showed how William is currently trialing the inclusion of forage crops and alternative forages for finishing lambs. William has sown chicory, plantain and red clover to identify options to provide palatable crops to finishing lambs and reduce worm burdens. He explained that dry Springs at sowing have compromised the crops and he feels that going forward Autumn-sown crops might yield better results on his farm. He has had success with the hybrid brassica, Redstart, which he sows in April and begins to graze in mid to late June with the heaviest ram lambs. Three to four grazings are completed, with ram lambs drafted off the crop to slaughter. A further grazing is taken in February with pregnant ewe-lambs prior to sowing the field to a spring cereal.

We would like to Mullinahone Co-Op for their continued support







## Summer Tour goes virtual

**Stuart Childs** IGA Council Member, Dairy Farmer and Teagasc



The Irish Grassland Association's Dairy Summer Tour sponsored by AIB successfully went virtual on 23 July 2020. Stuart Childs hosted a live webinar and revisited three farmers that hosted the Summer Tour over the last number of years to see what changes were made in the intervening years.

Speaking at the event, Head of Agriculture at AIB, Tadhg Buckley said the three farmers shared a number of key attributes that are central to their success including networking, being good with people and taking on new information and tailoring it to their farms. I hope that everyone who watched the webinar took something away that they could implement on their own farm. The next decade is going to be very important for Irish dairy farming and those farmers that can adapt and adjust to the new norms such as environmental sustainability will be the ones that can continue to prosper.

#### David Kerr, Ballyfin, Co Laois

The Webinar started with Laois farmer and 2014 host David Kerr. Since then David has increased cow

numbers by 10 to 150 on a 64ha milking platform. All heifers are now contract reared. One of the biggest challenges encountered by David since the tour has been soil fertility. Indexes were found to be very low after soil testing in 2014. Building these indexes has been a slow and expensive road and soil testing is now carried out every year. For the next number of years David paused all reseeding until soil fertility improved.

#### Henry Walsh, Oranmore, Co Galway

Since hosting the tour in 2015 Henry Walsh's herd has increased from 240 to 320 cows. As cow numbers increased the farms infrastructure was coming under more pressure and up to 18 rows were being milked through the farms 16 unit parlour. With Henry's son Enda coming home to farm they felt it was the right time to undertake an infrastructure upgrade. A 50 bail rotary and new cubicle house was constructed in 2018. Henry explained that they made a decision to stick with and invest in one unit rather than setting up a second unit which could put pressure on labour resources. Henry also stressed



that he feels 300 cows is the absolute minimum required to justify a rotary.

#### Conor Creedon, Rathmore, Co Kerry

Having hosted the tour in 2016 Conor Creedon was the most recent farmer revisited. Since then the herd has expanded from 96 cows to 144, in line with ground coming available alongside his milking platform. The first block came up in 2017 and a new collecting yard, feed space and cubicles was constructed in 2018. More land was added in 2019 and all heifers were contract reared from spring 2020. All these projects as well as grazing infrastructure on the new land were funded from cashflow and all was running smoothly until 2019 when milk output was lower than expected due to an animal health issue. Conor said they got through this because they were disciplined on all spending on land and especially buildings. The next project on

> We would like to thank our sponsors AIB for their continued support #IGADairy #BackedbyAIB

#### Mike Egan, Stuart Childs and Stan Lalor from the IGA and Tadhg Buckley AIB

the horizon is a new parlour in two or three years as milking is taking too long.

#### Q and A

Q: All three farms have made significant investments in soil fertility in recent years. What benefits are you seeing?

David Kerr (DK): I am just starting to see the benefits now. I feel that the soil is not as addicted to nitrogen when the PH, P and K are correct.

Henry Walsh (HW): A healthy vibrant soil will be fluffy and deep which makes it easier for the roots to go deeper for nutrients. We have to encourage roots to go deeper to access available nutrients.

Conor Creedon (CC): Lime helps drain soil and visibly improves earthworm activity.



#### Q: What does the future look like on your farm?

DK: I will be happy growing 15t of dry matter per hectare and will match cow numbers with grass growth. Currently the herd is 4.2 lactations on average and I would like to get to 5. My best cows are doing 700kg of milk solids. If we have a 20% replacement rate while keeping empty rates low and culling the bottom 3-4% of cows we might be pleasantly surprised what they will do. For people expanding with young herds, there is a big lift when the herd settles.

HW: We have witnessed a loss in milk solid output as the herd was growing and we haven't been removing the bottom 10%. Now we are after days in milk. Over the last few years we have moved to 100% AI, sexed semen and we won't be calving cows in April. These changes along with a slightly more generous grass allocation mid-summer should show a significant rise in milk output.

CC: This year we are on track to produce 450kg of milk solids with over 50% of the herd made up of first and second lactation animals. The cows will do significantly more when the herd settles.

#### Q: What advise do you have for a young person starting out dairy farming?

**DK:** Complete agricultural education and then travel. This travel doesn't have to be linked to agriculture. Then find yourself a good mentor.

HW: Early on in your career be careful spending on capital expenditure. Invest in soil fertility, grass and genetics. Focus on areas that make money not areas like concrete that consume it.

CC: If resources are limited prioritise areas such as stock and soil fertility. You have to grow the grass and then you must have the cow to convert this grass into milk solids. Don't compromise on the cow. They will be the basis of the herd for the next 30-40 years.

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## **IGA Virtual Beef Event Review** The O'Connor Farm

by **Christy Watson**, IGA Vice President 2020-21 and Teagasc

In June 2018, the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) visited the O'Connor farm near the village of Moone in south Kildare.

The farm is run as a partnership by Monica, Tom and their son Thomas, a truly mixed farm with four enterprises on the farm comprising beef, sheep, tillage and pigs. In 2015, Thomas was the winner of the FBD Young Beef Farmer of the year competition. The beef enterprise was comprised of 90 suckler cows with all male progeny finished as bulls under16 months and heifers at 21 months, with 200 additional cattle purchased for finishing comprising of both young bulls and heifers. The unique feature of this farm is the way the O'Connors paddock graze the cattle in large groups during the grazing season. The 90 suckler cows and four breeding bulls are grazed together as one group in 2ha paddocks; up to 77 young bulls have been grazed in one group for the grazing season and up 100 heifers are grazed together in one group.

Grassland management was excellent with all the farm laid out in 2ha paddocks, with the provision for subdivision of all paddocks. On our visit to the O`Connor farm, we saw the three pillars that support high output - breeding, grassland management and livestock management. The O'Connors were achieving an annual stocking rate of 3.3LU/ha and a beef output of 1,498kg of live weight/ha. Grass utilised in 2017 was 11.5t/DM/ha.

We re-visited the O Connor farm in July 2020 to see what developments had taken place and to talk to Thomas about his future plans for the farm.

Despite the short period since our last visit, a lot had changed on the farm. The sheep enterprise has expanded to a flock of 250 breeding ewes, with plans to increase the flock to 300 ewes. No changes have been made to the tillage area; the pig enterprise also remains unchanged. The cattle enterprise has seen changes with 20 less suckler cows in the herd - partly due to a bull fertility problem necessitating increased culling. Less store cattle have been purchased due to the herd being TB restricted and also in a planned approach to meet the organic nitrogen (N) reductions necessary to comply with the BEAM scheme. The O'Connors have invested in their beef enterprise with the building of a 6-bay slatted house with a lie back, calving pens and two





feed passages. In order to reduce labour input - and in the interests of the safe handling of livestock - a new state of the art cattle handling unit was built incorporating a circular forcing pen, drafting/ handling pens and weighing facility with a Bluetooth compatible clock to enable reading of EID tags.

Due to the impact of drought on the farm, bulls had been put onto finishing rations earlier in order to maintain rotation length and average farm cover. In order to achieve better utilisation of nutrients in slurry, a dribble bar was fitted onto the existing slurry tank; this also enables the O'Connors to spread slurry onto the grazing paddocks and reduce chemical N usage, while at the same time reducing ammonia emissions. Chemical fertilizer use had also changed with protected urea the product of choice to further reduce ammonia emissions while reducing fertiliser costs.

Reflecting the O'Connor family interest in onfarm biodiversity, they have joined the European Innovation Partnership Project: 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators'.

Additionally, the O'Connor farm hosts the Teagasc Grass 10 course. This involves monthly meetings held on the farm where course participants can see at first-hand excellence in grassland management on a beef farm.

As if Thomas was not already busy enough on an intensive livestock/tillage farm and involvement with Macra, he has taken on the role of IFA County Chairman for Kildare/West Wicklow.

Regarding future plans, the O'Connors intend to increase ewe numbers further to 300 breeding ewes. Once the farm becomes clear of TB and the BEAM reduction period has passed, the suckler cow numbers will go back up to 90 cows along with a resumption of normal cattle finishing numbers. All cattle will be EID tagged to facilitate efficient and safe capture of cattle performance and allow rapid interpretation of weighing results.

The IGA would like to sincerely thank Thomas and his parents Monica and Tom for allowing us to revisit the farm, so that we could present a Virtual Beef event in 2020 for our members and we wish them well in the future.

## IGA Virtual Beef Event Review The Halpin Farm



The Halpin Family farm in Co. Meath was one of three farms that featured in this summer's IGA Virtual Beef Event. In July 2017, the Halpin farm hosted an afternoon farm walk as part of the association's Beef Open Day. With circumstances preventing an on-farm beef event in July 2020, the virtual tour offered up an excellent opportunity to re-visit the Halpin's farm and explore some of the changes that had taken place over the last three years, as well as some of the future plans for the farm.

The virtual tour of the farm consisted of three videos, presented by Tom Halpin and his son Matthew.

#### Video 1: The farm system and recent changes

In video one, viewers were given an overview of the farm's system. The land-base comprises of 160ac of free-draining permanent grassland, situated in oneblock, explained Tom. This block sustains the herd of 105 suckler cows, where the genetic background is a three-way mix of Charolais, Limousin and Simmental breeding. All progeny are brought to beef on the farm, with males slaughtered under 16-months of age between May and July. Matthew went on to explain the two routes for female progeny; approximately half are selected for breeding to calve at two years of age, while the surplus heifers are taken to slaughter at 20 to 22 months of age. One hundred percent of replacements are bred on-farm.

The video also detailed one major change that took place on the farm. In the past, the herd was split calving, with 60% calving in February and March, and the remaining 40% calving in July and August. However, since the open day in 2017, the farm has moved to a 100% spring-calving system, with 2020 being the first spring in which all cows calved. The key reason for such a move was to maximize grazed grass on the farm by having less grazing groups and by not having to feed suckling cows over the winter. Better herd management, particularly with vaccinations, was also sited.

#### Video 2: The farm in 2020

The second video detailed how things were going on the farm in 2020. Tom noted that calving, which started in early February and ended in mid-April, went very well with over 100 live calves on the ground from 97 cows calved. The mortality rate was low and there

We would like to Mullinahone Co-Op for their continued support was also a higher-than-normal number of twins born. Matthew followed on with an update on breeding. Onehundred and three females in total were earmarked for breeding, 23 of which were maiden heifers. Breeding commenced in the last week of April and concluded on July 10. A preliminary scan showed that 86 females were due to calve in the first eight weeks of calving 2021.

All the 2019 spring-born males were sold at under 16-months of age between May 10 and July 10. The group averaged a 395kg carcass weight, while fat scores and grades were very satisfactory. In terms of fodder conservation, a first cut of silage was completed during the first week of June. Drought conditions affected yield in this crop, however, quality appeared to be quite high. Further on in the summer, a total of 160 bales of silage were made from surplus grass and a second cut of pit silage was made in mid-July.

#### Video 3: Future plans

The final video highlighted some future plans for the farm. Matthew explained that a reseeding programme had recently commenced, with the plan being to reseed 15ac per year over the next ten years. The first year comprised an 18ac field which was reseeded in late-August after the second-cut of silage. The field was burned off and reseeded in a traditional plough, till and sow method. It also received dung, lime and fertiliser. In 2020, the benefits of this reseed were huge, with the field sustaining a stocking rate of over 2.5LU/ha as well as growing 100 bales of surplus grass.

Another new development in 2020 was the use of a synchronization programme during breeding to facilitate the use of Al. A group of 34 cows were synchronized in a fixed-time Al protocol. After the initial serve, 20 cows proved in calf, with 10 more holding to the first repeat and a further two holding to their second repeat. That resulted in a total of 32 cows out of 34 in-calf after six weeks of breeding. Heat detection, labour and the opportunity to use Al genetics were flagged as being major benefits from the process. Going forward, the plan is to increase the use of Al via synchronization.

Again, the IGA would like to thank the Halpin family for hosting the virtual tour and we wish them the very best for 2021 and beyond.



## IGA Virtual Beef Event Review The Turley Farm

In July 2011, crowds descended on the farm of Paul Turley in Downpatrick, Co. Down, for the IGA Beef Tour. At that time, Paul was farming 72ha part-time, running a 90-cow Angus suckler herd bringing both heifers and steers through to beef.

As part of the 2020 beef event – which took place online due to the Covid-19 pandemic - we revisited Paul to see what has changed in the intervening years and what direction the farm will take in the future. In four informative videos, Paul told his story.

In the period from 2011 until now, the Co. Down native has upped the ante and the farm has undergone some noticeable changes. Geographically located in an area where competition for land was not an issue, the land-base of the holding now spans to 160-165ha – which is well up on the area farmed in 2011.

An Angus calf-to-beef operation was employed on the farm for four years – a production model that worked well for Paul. And, at one stage, he thought of scaling back cow numbers and progressing with this enterprise. However, escalating calf prices resulted in a reduced margin and the decision was made to move away from this system.

Deciding to stay with the sucklers, the type of cow on the farm is largely the same – an Aberdeen Angus from a British Friesian herd. With this 'milky' cow, the Turleys have an expectation that the Angus-sired calf will be 320-360kg at 10 months-of-age. Last year, the average – across males and females - was 335kg at this point. Aiming for 0.7-0.8kg/day over the winter period, that leaves a 460kg animal going to grass in February, while they are drafted for slaughter at 600-610kg. The average age at slaughter over the past few years has been 17-17.5 months, with progeny normally falling into the 0+ or R- grade category.

As the land-base grew, the next challenge was to grow the cow numbers accordingly, while keeping a close eye on costs. By the end of 2020, the Turleys will have calved down 190 cows – 150 in the spring and 40 in the autumn. All going well, 220 will calve in 2021 with 250 earmarked for 2022.

While acquiring more land paved the way for a more intensive system, the return of Paul's son Frank to the farm has played a vital role in the expansion period, with both men now farming full-time. Frank's primary role is to manage grass and the grazing platform – a role that Paul notes he has done excellent with.

In fact, the first of the two biggest changes that have been implemented on the farm in recent years is the way the Turleys manage their grass. Where there was scope for grassland management and grazing facilities to be improved, measures have now been put in place, with a full rotational-grazing system employed, with accommodating paddocks, fencing and water troughs. Niall Claffey, IIGA Council Member and Tradeforus



Also, regular grass measuring takes place on a weekly basis and every four-to-five days during critical periods. The figure of 12t DM/ha is targeted, but the land can be prone to drought which brings that figure back to 7-8t DM/ha – with 2018 and a period in 2020 noted as prime examples.

As predicted, the paddock system results in a certain amount of surplus grass and this is harvested to produce top-quality silage, reducing the need for expensive concentrates during the winter period, where animals are out-wintered on kale and silage – a tactic that has been in place for many years.

Paul highlights the achilles heel to the system is consistent growth rates over the winter - without concentrates - and the solution to that is quality silage. An all bale system, all double wrapped and cut at the right time results in silage with a 17-18% protein and 12ME value. This ensures that the calves hit that 0.8kg/day target on kale and silage only.

With the larger numbers, the Turleys had to adapt quickly while maintaining a very tight calving interval. Over the past three years, every cow has calved inside 60 days. This results in a labour-intensive month of February, but once that is over the backbone of the calving period is broken. The cows calve on their own which reduces labour input and, with grass available in the paddocks at that stage, every calf is at grass by the time its 24 hours old.

Angus stock bulls were employed during the breeding season – from a labour-efficiency perspective - but when the second big change on the farm occurred, the breeding strategy changed. New genetics were introduced to a proportion of the herd in 2016 – Wagyu, with the first calves hitting the ground in 2017. As these genetics were only available through AI, this method was used during the breeding season. If, and when, Wagyu bulls are available, Paul will revert to the bull method and back off the AI – purely from a labour point of view. The decision to move to Wagyu was market-led due to reduced premium associated with Angus cattle brought about by their increased availability.

Paul has now secured a contract with a retailer and beef processor for a year-round supply of Wagyu beef. While a proportion of Angus cattle are still finished on the farm, the plan going forward is to move to a 100% Wagyu system. Paul noted that while the Wagyu progeny's conformation and growth rates are not as strong as the Angus, it is the marble score that counts at slaughter. This, he said, needs time so heifers and steers will be slaughtered at 24-25 months of age or possibly that little bit older. The first batch of the heifers were slaughtered at 31 months and averaged 369kg, while the males averaged 432kg at 31.5 months.

The IGA council would like to Paul Turley for partaking in this year's virtual beef event and we look forward to hearing how the new Wagyu system fares in the future.

## **Future Proofing Irish Dairying** goes live on 6 January

**Bryan Hynes** id Dairv Farme

The IGA dairy conference entitled 'Future proofing Irish dairying' will be broadcast at 10am on Wednesday 6 January. The 90-minute conference will be delivered online meaning it can be enjoyed from the comfort of your own home or office. It consists of three short and punchy presentations, each followed by a questions and answer session chaired by IGA Council member and dairy farmer Laurence Sexton.

Sponsored by Yara, the conference aims to give Irish dairy farmers an insight into the future and help prepare for the 2021 season. Dairygold CEO Jim Woulfe will open proceedings by looking at our milk markets and discuss current and future opportunities for Irelands dairy sector.

Continuing the theme of looking into the future, Teagasc grassland research officer, Dr Deirdre Hennessy will examine how Irish farmers can continue to grow current levels of grass production using less chemical nitrogen. The third and final speaker is dairy farmer Tom O'Connell from Inniscarra Co. Cork and he will illustrate how he sets his farm up for springtime. Tom will share some of his labour-saving tips and tricks that saves time and streamlines his farm.

## The IGA dairy conference sponsored by Yara can be watched on www.irishgrassland.ie

## **PRESENTATION 1:** 'Can we sell our milk?'

## Jim Woulfe, Dairygold Co-op CEO

Jim Woulfe is the Chief Executive Officer of Dairygold Co-op, will open the conference with an insightful paper simply entitled 'Can we sell our milk'? Jim has steered and overseen the development of Dairygold Co-op through the recent years of milk-pool expansion on farms and processing levels. Looking ahead, with a larger annual milk pool being produced and with opportunities for further expansion still available, he will speak about the current and future opportunities for the Irish dairy sector to be sustained and to continue to grow, particularly reflecting on the need for markets for the milk output of the Irish dairy herd.

## **PRESENTATION 2:** 'Can we reduce chemical N fertiliser application without impacting herbage production?'

### Dr. Deirdre Hennessy, Teagasc grassland research officer

The use of nitrogen (N) fertiliser on farms is under scrutiny and the quantity of chemical N fertiliser that will be permitted for use on farms is likely to be reduced in the years ahead. In this presentation we will look what can be done on farm so that we can continue to grow enough grass to meet the demand of the dairy herd if chemical N fertiliser is reduced. Making the best use of the N available is crucial in terms of grass growth. Research shows that increasing white clover on farm has herbage production benefits when N fertiliser is reduced. Increasing N use efficiency is also crucial so that N losses from the system are reduced and are instead available for grass production.

## We would like to thank our sponsors YARA for their continued support







## **PRESENTATION 3:** 'Switched on for the spring'

### Tom O'Connell, Dairy farmer

Knowledge grows

Tom O'Connell farms near Inniscarra outside Cork city with his wife Helen and their four daughters. They are milking 320 cows on a milking platform of 90 ha, farming 150 ha in total. Tom is the Labour Management focus farmer for the Teagasc Dairygold Joint Programme 2018-2021, running his operation with the assistance of two full-time staff Daniel Lyons and Dan O'Mahony. Tom's herd delivered 481kgs milk solids/cow to Dairygold at 3.72% protein and 4.37% fat in 2019 and is on target to deliver this again in 2020. Tom is going to focus on how he, Helen, Daniel and Dan are preparing to handle calving 90% of the herd in 6 weeks in spring 2021. This will be achieved through having good facilities, excellent communication amongst the team, work planning and use of simple visual aids to ensure the various processes happen in a very efficient manner.



## IGA dairy conference sponsored by Yara When: Wednesday 6 January at 10am Where: Live on IGA www.irishgrassland.ie

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## A Year in my Wellies Jason Melbourne, Dairy farmer, Killavullen, Co Cork

Things are still working away here as normal as can be at the moment in Killavullen, Co Cork. Even though it has been a very strange year with all that has been happening with Corona virus, we are trying to work as normal and keep things running as smoothly as possible.

#### **Breeding**

As I discussed in my last article we are very pleased with how our breeding strategy has gone this year. We had really wanted to place a big effort on breeding this year and that included a lot of pre breeding work with the animals in terms of getting cows cycling and in the right body condition score. This extra effort has seen us reap the rewards as we are extremely impressed following our recent scanning which resulted in a 9% empty rate after 13 weeks of breeding. We were particularly impressed with the scanning of our heifers as we got an empty rate of only 1%, this outlines the importance of reaching target weights with the heifers. We are hopeful following these results that we will hit 90% calved within 6 weeks next spring.

#### **Grass Management**

In general, we are very happy with grass growth this year. At present we are on target to grow 17 tonnes of dry matter per hectare (T/DM/HA) for the year. We noticed a slight decline in the grass growth this autumn, in hindsight we should have decreased nitrogen application mid-summer to have more of an allocation of nitrogen for the autumn. We had a target autumn peak average farm cover of 1,200 KG/DM/HA but only reached a peak of 1,050.. This has meant that we had feed high quality bale silage to compensate the lack of grass. This has been a lesson learnt and will be something we will pay more attention to next summer. The main target now is to have an average farm cover of 800 by the 1st of December. This is critical in allowing us to have enough grass on the farm next spring with cows calving so compactly. For the remainder of the year our target is to get residuals correct now to have good quality grass for cows next



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spring and getting housing cleaned and disinfected and all repairs and maintenance jobs around the farm completed.

Each year we soil test the farm to identify any low fertility paddocks so that we can target these with the required nutrients. Before the closing date we spread slurry on fields that were low in potassium to bring these back up to index 3.

#### **Body Condition Score**

Every October we body condition score the whole herd to identify any cows not in the correct body condition score (BCS). Ideally we would like a BCS of 3 for our herd. Any cows below 2.75 BCS will get a 12 week dry period instead of the normal 8 week dry period. This is critical to have them calving down in the right condition as it is very difficult to gain any condition after calving. After we completed this we identified 15% of the herd were below the target BCS and these will be given 12 weeks dry in order to build their condition.

#### The importance of budgeting

We recently met as a group to discuss the financial budgets for the farms and gauge how we are performing compared to what was budgeted. We do this on a quarterly basis in order to keep on top of things and identify any areas that we need to put more of our attention on. It also allows us to identify areas that require maintenance and allow us to set aside a budget for such areas.

#### My future plans

My time working on farms across the country has taught me so much and my plan was always to put all the skills and knowledge I have learned from each and every farmer I have worked for into practice and make the move back home to the South East and begin leasing a farm closer to home. My aim over the next 12 months is to source a suitable farm and farm owner that will allow me to put these plans into action with cows of my own.



## Kevin Feeney – Calf to Beef system

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

#### Farm profile

Kevin Feeney is farming outside Ballinrobe in County Mayo. The 25ha holding, like many in the west of Ireland, is fragmented with seven separate blocks of land. Kevin is also working full time off farm. The farm is mostly limestone ground with about 5 ha of heavier ground that Kevin's father reclaimed. The farm was milking cows up to 2000, before exiting milk production and getting into suckler cows. Up to 2015 Kevin ran a suckler herd, however due to pressures on the profitability of the system and managing suckler cows on a fragmented farm, Kevin decided to switch to a calf to beef system. Due to the history of the farm in dairying, Kevin had grown up with bucket fed calves and had the skills to transition into calf to beef. Kevin is now finishing - 55-60 mostly Aberdeen Angus heifers. The heifers are slaughtered at 19-20 months. Unlike most farms running a calf to beef system calves are bought in both the autumn and spring, spreading out workload and cashflow across the year.

#### Ewe flock

In addition to the beef enterprise, Kevin runs a flock of 80 ewes, lambing in February, the flock is a mix of Texel cross and Suffolk cross ewes. All lambs are finished by the end of July on grass and some creep feeding. The lambs are sold through the South Mayo producer group of which Kevin is currently the chairman. The ewe flock works well in combination with the calf to beef enterprise as when ewes are lambing in February, the autumn born calves are off milk, and the spring calves are on milk.

#### Calf rearing

Calves are sourced in November and February. Kevin prefers to buy calves 4-6 weeks old as he feels that these calves are over most of their animal health challenges. Calves are fed milk replacer and offered clean water, hay and meal once they arrive on farm. Calves are monitored closely when they arrive as the stress of travel can result in animal health issues. Calves are weaned once they reach 110 kg and eating 1kg of meal.



Typically, calves are sourced through agents and are bought in groups of 6 to 12. The calves are typically sourced in the south of Ireland, carrying on a long tradition of calves moving from the south to the west for rearing. Kevin would be open to setting up a relationship with local dairy farms if suitable arrangements could be put in place. The margins in the system are tight and Kevin feels that discipline on calf price is important. If you pay too much for calves, there will be no margin left for the calf rearer.

#### **Grassland management**

The success of the system relies on achieving as much weight gain from grazed grass as possible. Kevin has noticed the huge improvement in grass growth and utilisation by the installation of a paddock grazing system. Over half the farm has been reseeded in recent years and there is a nutrient management plan in place to improve soil fertility across the farm. All the pastures on the farm currently are very productive and animals are achieving high live weight gains from grazed grass. Typically, calves are fed 0.5 kg of meal when grazing for the 1<sup>st</sup> summer and 1.5 kg of meal when housed



for the first winter. Silage quality is good, ranging from 72-75 DMD, and this allows Kevin to keep meal feeding levels low during the winter months. Kevin says that having good quality silage is vital to achieving good weight gains indoors. Stock must be constantly thriving to ensure they are fit for slaughter at 19-20 months. Heifers are typically finished over a six-week period on 3 kg of concentrate. No leader follower system is used as the farm is simply too fragmented. Stock are moved every 3-4 days and surplus silage is removed where a surplus arises on any of the different blocks.

#### Animal performance

Heifers slaughtered on the farm in 2019 killed out between 255-300kg dead weight and graded O- to R-. All animals are all slaughtered in Jennings Meats in Ballinrobe. The heifers are not slaughtered on the grid and instead a flat price plus a breed bonus is paid. This is a distinct advantage for these types of animals. The quality of calves is always an issue and Kevin would prefer to get better grades but thinks it is unlikely due to sire selection on dairy farms heavily favouring easy calving short gestation beef bulls.



**Always Improving** 

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#### Tomas O'Leary, IGA Council Member and Sheep & Beef Farmer



Thomas O'Leary farms close to the village of Barraduff in Co. Kerry and his farming career started with the completion of his Green Cert in 1985. At that time Tomas had a suckler herd selling all calves as weanlings with replacements entering the herd in the form of in calf cull

cows from dairy herds. Grassland management was not part of the farm management plan back then with fields ranging in size from 5 acres to 30 acres meaning that grass supply was difficult to manage and inconsistent, a feast or a famine so to speak.

Sheep were introduced to the farm in 1987 with the purchase of Scotch cross Suffolk ewe lambs which

were mated as ewe lambs. Tomas admits that, at the time, he knew very little about sheep and he made every mistake there was to make. In the early years there were no wintering facilities on the farm for sheep, so they were outwintered. Outwintering the sheep led to grass being very scarce in the spring resulting in ewes being fed concentrates post lambing and a delayed return of cows and calves to grass after the winter months. The longer housing period of the cows was a big cost to the system however Tomas remarked that input costs were much lower compared to today and the increased fertiliser, feed and contractor costs were manageable at the time. As well as input costs being more affordable, sales prices were also relatively high in comparison to today and despite poor management decisions the farm was still profitable. Tomas now looks back and sees this as a time of wasted opportunity, stating that if the farm had been managed as efficiently as it is now, there was a great opportunity to make a good profit.

As input costs started to rise and farm gates prices fell, Tomas realised that something had to change to ensure the farm remained viable into the future. It was apparent that the stocking rate of the farm needed to increase, and overall farm production needed to become more efficient. Grassland management was an area that required attention and grass was set to be the basis of the increase in farm intensification and efficiency. Tomas started reseeding fields and initially used temporary fencing to create a basic rotational grazing system. Winter housing was improved for both sheep and cows to house the additional animals and to comply with the new environmental requirements that were being introduced at the time. The suckler herd replacement policy seen an overhaul with the breeding policy now focusing on home bred Simmental and Limousine replacements while Charolais was terminal sire of choice. In 2003 Tomas again decided to change his system to further add to the gains made in breeding and grassland management. Suckler cow numbers were decreased and all stock were finishing on farm rather than selling them as weanlings. This system worked well with Tomas achieving heavy carcass weights of 420kg and above at 24 months of age, but alas Tomas hit a bump in the road when the factories introduced penalties for heavier carcasses, and it was time to go back to the drawing board again.

At this stage Tomas decided to invest further in the sheep enterprise by installing a central farm



roadway, permanent sheep fencing and dividing up fields into smaller paddocks. The largest paddock on the farm at present is 5 acres, that was the size of the smallest field when Tomas stared out on his farming journey. Despite the sheep enterprise working well for Tomas, lamb prices slumped to a low in 2009 and he considered selling his sheep flock. Not one to give up easily, Tomas, along with a group of farmers from around the ring of Kerry came together to address the problem and consequently formed "The Ring of Kerry Quality Lamb Producer Group". At the time of its inception lamb price was sitting at €3.60/kg while the group guaranteed its members €5/kg which would ensure the viability of the farms involved. The initial business plan was to sell a processed lamb, butchered to individual requirements. In the beginning the majority of sales were to family and friends of the group members but hotel and restaurant sales soon followed. The group have gone from strength to strength, having set up an online shop which increased the reach of their product, and the group are pleased to say they have sold lamb into households in every county in Ireland.

The improvement in lamb price made the sheep enterprise more profitable and it became the main focus of Tomas's farm. Tomas started performance recording his flock in 2011 and the data captured was used to find the high and low performing ewes to make a more informed decision on



retaining replacements, as well as, tracking lamb performance across the year. In 2013, Tomas made the decision to join the Teagasc Better Farm Sheep Program and increased ewe numbers from 150 to 320. At this point all suckler cows were sold to facilitate the larger ewe flock while a beef enterprise remained on the farm with 90 continental weanling heifers bought in to be finished on farm. Joining the Better Farm Sheep Programme provided Tomas with an invaluable source of advice and expertise and the target of €1000 gross margin per hectare was set for the farm. As well as increasing ewe numbers, Belclare blood was introduced into the flock to increase ewe prolificacy with Belclare cross Suffolk and Belclare cross Texel ewe lambs being retained as replacements. Replacements were mated as ewe lambs and achieved a scanning rate of 1.6 to 1.7 lambs per ewe joined while the mature ewe flock achieved a scanning rate of 2.0 to 2.3 lambs per ewe joined. Charollais rams were used as the terminal sire on all ewes not selected to breed replacements and all lambs are finished on farm.

The Sheep enterprise performed well and easily achieved the target gross margin figure; however, the cattle enterprise was struggling to meet the target. Again, Tomas decided to change his tactics and changed to purchasing 18 month old Friesian bullocks to bring to slaughter which was successful

for the first year but fluctuations in purchase price and factory price meant that it wasn't a viable option for Tomas, so again he went back to the drawing board. He is now contract rearing dairy heifers alongside his ewe flock and the two systems work well together. Tomas's commitment to grassland infrastructure and management was recognised and rewarded with him being crowned the 2018 sheep grassland farmer of the year.

It has been a long road with many bumps for Tomas to find the system that works for him and it is his flexibility and willingness to adapt that has ensured his farm has remained a viable business. Despite the many changes in Tomas's farm the one consistent has been the sheep enterprise and thanks to the marketing of his lamb through The Ring of Kerry Quality Lamb Producer Group, he has ensured the future viability of this enterprise for many years to come. Despite the ups and downs of farming, Tomas maintains that it is a great life, with no two days being the same and the opportunity to be your own boss. Despite his pride in his farm and his produce Tomas feels that Irish farmers and their excellent produce are under appreciated but he is hopeful that the uncertainties that 2020 has brought to all our lives will teach us that farming and food production are essential services and always will be.



#### Introduction

Milk production in Ireland is seasonal and grass based, with calving date targeted to coincide with the start of grass growth. Feed supply in the form of grazed grass matches or exceeds the demand for spring calving dairy cows from approximately mid-April to mid-October. A significant quantity of milk is produced in the shoulder periods (spring and autumn) of the year and so it is important to exploit the potential of grazed-grass available during this period (Roche et al., 1996), because it is a low cost and high quality feed (Finneran et al., 2012). The availability of sufficient herbage for grazing in early spring is possible through appropriate autumn grazing management and through grass budgeting in spring (Murphy, 1977; O'Donovan et al., 2002; Kennedy et al., 2006). To meet the target of matching animal feed requirements with available herbage in spring, autumn grazing management has been identified as the key controllable management practice on farm (Claffey et al., 2019). Over the last 10 years (2008–2017), Irish dairy farmers have made considerable herd fertility improvements by

reducing mean calving interval, increasing 6-week calving rate from 61% to 72%, while mean calving dates have reduced by 8 days (Dillon et al., 2018). The proportion of cows calving in the months of January to April has increased from 74% in 2008 to 84% in 2018 (ICBF, 2018). This, coupled with an increase in average herd size from 48 cows in 2005 to 76 cows in 2016 (Kelly et al., 2020), was associated with an increase in whole-farm stocking rate from 1.71 LU/ha to 1.93 LU/ha (Hanrahan et al., 2018). All this resulted in an increase in feed demand on Irish farms in spring. This increased demand must be met through increased grass growth and utilisation if farms are to remain economically sustainable (Dillon et al., 2005).

#### Spring grazing management

Excellent spring grazing management is crucial to reduce costs and increase output on farms. The main objectives of spring grazing management are to increase the proportion of grazed grass in the diet of the dairy cow and to condition swards for subsequent grazing rotations. Three factors dictate the success

of spring grazing: 1) spring fertiliser management, 2) turnout cover and 3) grazing management.

#### **Spring Fertiliser**

One of the most important factors affecting spring grass growth on Irish dairy farms is the date and quantity of spring N fertiliser application. The application of N in early spring increases grass growth to allow the majority of the nutrient requirements of cows to be met from grazed grass. There is always an element of debate around the right approach for N application in spring. The dilemma usually hinges around the knowledge that N applied in early spring is normally less efficient in terms of kg of grass DM grown per kg of N applied. The high value associated with grass availability in early spring means that even relatively small additional quantities of grass can be a big help to the overall feed budget. The breakeven response required for N in terms of grass production will vary with grass value and N fertiliser price. A response of 4-6 kg of extra grass DM grown per kg of N applied would be normally required to reach a break-even response to cover the cost of fertiliser. Applying N in spring in a way that maximises the response is important both to ensure good return over cost and also to help minimise potential losses of N from the soil either to water or as gaseous losses. Improving the efficiency of N use during this period is a major opportunity for improving environmental credentials associated with N efficiency in the future. Some useful guidelines are worth considering around decision making on spring N. Firstly, early spring growth will be influenced by the genetic capacity within the sward to respond the N application.

Newer swards with high perennial ryegrass contents will be more likely to respond to N than older more diverse swards. Soil factors driven by soil texture in combination with weather will also influence N response. Colder soils are obviously slower to respond, and a rule of thumb of soil temperatures reaching 5-6 °C and rising as a guideline for first N application is worth noting when deciding on timing in early spring. Likewise, soil drainage plays a big role as land that is more prone to extended waterlogging and poor trafficability for extended periods in most springs is less likely to respond to early nitrogen.

A three-year study (2018-2020) set up at Teagasc Moorepark, is investigating the influence of N rate and timing of application on spring DM production. The results suggest that for the March 18<sup>th</sup> harvest, N response was 8 kg DM/kg N from a January 20th application, at a rate of 30 kg N/ha. A number of previous experiments in Ireland have shown similar responses of 710 kg DM/kg N applied in January. It has been reported that N application always advanced, by approximately three weeks, the date in spring by which any given yield of grass was attained. Clearly, the application of N should be carried out as early as circumstances permit. The optimum level of N used for early grass will depend on grass demand (stocking rate). For most intensive  $(\rightarrow 2.5 \text{ LU/ha})$  dairy farms in Ireland the optimum level of N to apply is 30 kg N/ha in mid-January to early-February, a combination of chemical N fertiliser and slurry applied using LESS, and 56 kg N/ha in March, a total of 85 kg N/ha by April 1st for early spring grass.



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#### **Opening farm cover**

A grazing management plan in place for spring is crucial, in many ways grazing during early spring means managing a feed deficit, as demand for grass is higher than grass growth. This results in a decline, at first, in average farm cover, and a plan is required to control the rate of farm cover decline, otherwise farm covers will be run down too far. Higher stocking rates will place added pressure on available feed resources on farms. The development of disciplined feed budgeting during spring will be among the greatest opportunities for Irish dairy farmers to expand their businesses profitably while continuing to harness the benefits of a predominantly grassbased diet. Opening spring farm cover has a large impact on impending spring herbage allocation to the herd. Opening with a low average farm cover means there is less available grass for grazing.

The first rotation should start in February and continue until early to mid-April. This varies from farm to farm and year-to-year but the most

	High OFC	Low OFC	Diff
Opening Farm Cover (kg DM/ha)	1150	650	+500
Grass allocation (kg DM/cow/day)	12.2	8.5	+3.7
Pre-grazing herbage mass (kg DM/ha)	1522	1028	+494
Cumulative Concentrate feed (kg DM/cow)	260	260	0
Cumulative Silage (kg DM/cow)	150	290	-140
Post-grazing sward height (cm)	3.8	3.4	+0.4
Cumulative Milk solids (kg/cow)	195	173	+22
Cumulative Milk solids (kg/ha)	574	510	+64

Commencing grazing with a high opening farm cover resulted in more grass available for lactating cows during the 86-day study period (approx. 320 kg DM per cow). The higher grass allocation resulted in an additional 22 kg MS/cow and 64 kg MS/ha produced by May 1<sup>st</sup> (12% increase in milk output). An additional 64 kg MS/ha at a value of €4.50/kg MS is worth €288/ha, equating to an additional €11,520 in additional milk sales on a 40-ha dairy farm. Hence, having a greater opening farm cover at the start of calving and achieving greater grass utilisation has a significant impact on farm performance (physical and financial). If a high farm cover is achieved in spring, it allows farms with lower SR have an opportunity to reduce the level of supplementation important aspect of grazing management is to make good use of spring grass. The period from calving to breeding is a critical time for both herd and grassland management. Cows should be turned out to grass as soon as possible post-calving. Profitability will increase as higher cost feeds such as grass silage and concentrate are reduced or eliminated from the diet.

An experiment was established at Teagasc Moorepark to examine the effect of opening farm cover (OFC; high or low) on animal performance in early lactation over a 3-year period. Both treatments had the same stocking rate (2.95 LU/ha) and calving pattern. Table 1 summarises the results for animal performance during the first and second rotation (February  $6^{th}$  to May 1<sup>st</sup> - 2017 to 2019).

**Table 1:** The effect of high and low opening farmcovers on grazing and animal performance in earlylactation (February 6 to May 1 - 2017 to 2019)

(concentrate and silage) offered to lactating dairy cows.

#### Spring grazing management

Grazing management in the first two months after turnout determines spring grass growth and cumulative growth for the remainder of the year. By combining the decisions from the spring rotation planner (SRP) with a spring feed budget, while actively monitoring average farm cover, spring milk production off grass will be optimised. Regrowth rates on the grazed ground and average farm cover must to be monitored, particularly from early March, so that strategic management decisions around grazing, such as grass allocations and supplementation, can be made and the targeted end date of the first rotation calculated. Recent data from Moorepark has shown that swards closed early in October, once grazed in spring, have a 40% reduction in regrowth in spring, compared to swards closed later in October and November. This should be considered with grazing swards in spring that the regrowth of swards can vary greatly depending on pre-grazing herbage mass and closing date. Average farm cover should not be allowed to drop below 500 kg DM/ha in March. If this happens the level of grass available for grazing animals is reduced and also there will be greater levels of supplementation required. PastureBase Ireland data shows that farms where farm cover dropped below 500 kg DM/ha in mid-March were allocating 7.4 kg DM/cow grass, 3.5 kg DM/cow silage and 4.4 kg DM/cow concentrate, on average; whereas farms with a farm cover greater than 500 kg DM/ha were allocating 12.9 kg DM/cow grass (an extra 5.5 kg DM/cow/day) and 3 kg DM/cow concentrate, on average, and no silage.

Additional to farm cover management, SRP is a vital tool for spring grass management; however, it should not be used in isolation. Grazing a certain area per week creates a wedge-shape grass supply. The importance of creating a wedge-shape grass supply is crucial to ensure enough grass is available in the second rotation. Data from PBI (n=65 farms) indicates that, on average, 22% (range 0 to 52%) of the grazing platform was grazed in February, well below the target minimum of 30% grazed by March 1<sup>st</sup>. The same dataset indicated that for every 1% of the grazing area grazed in February, an additional 14 kg DM/ha was grown by 10<sup>th</sup> April. This equates to an additional 125 kg DM/ha grown on those farms by April 10<sup>th</sup>. A target of 1450 kg DM/ha must be grown from January 1<sup>st</sup> to April 10<sup>th</sup> to meet the majority of the cow requirements from grazed grass. Another very important aspect of spring grazing is finishing the first rotation on time. This results in more grazings being achieved on the farm. On many farms the average number of grazings achieved per year can be as high as 10; some of these farms have 2.5 grazings completed by May 1st. in other word they are half-way through the third rotation by the first week of May. The relationship between spring grass growth and annual grazing DM production is positive and 43% of the variation in annual grazing DM production is accounted for by spring grass growth. Additionally, 2015 & 2016 PBI data shows (n=65 farms) mean spring grass production from January 1<sup>st</sup> to April 10<sup>th</sup> was 1239 kg DM/ha on farms grazed by April 10<sup>th</sup> compared to 994 kg DM/ha for farms grazed after April 10<sup>th</sup>., a 20% difference. Those farms that had finished the first rotation by April 10<sup>th</sup> had 29% of the area grazed by March 1<sup>st</sup>.



The February grazed area had an adequate regrowth interval to ensure availability of grass for the start of the second rotation.

An experiment carried out at Teagasc Moorepark, investigated the impact of opening farm cover (1150 and 650 kg DM/ha) and SRP length (normal and fast - Figure 1) on herbage production. When applying a fast SRP, 40% grazed by March 1st and 75% by March 17<sup>th</sup> and finish the first round by April 1<sup>st</sup>., it increased overall daily herbage allowance by 1.1 kg DM/cow/ day, compared to the standard SRP. However, daily herbage allowance in the 2<sup>nd</sup> rotation was reduced by 1.6 kg DM/cow/day when implementing a fast

Figure 1: Spring rotation planner length for the experimental period Feb 6<sup>th</sup> to April 8<sup>th</sup>.



#### Conclusion

The importance of spring grass in the diet of early lactation animals and its impact on subsequent sward production has previously been shown and management rules have been developed to assist farmers manage spring grass. However, there needs to be a renewed focus by farmers on early spring grazing. Spring rotation planner targets are not being met by many farmers, and as a result spring DM production on those farms is below that of farms that are reaching the SRP targets. Likewise, on farms implementing a fast SRP, an adequate opening farm cover needs to be in place in Feb ( $\rightarrow$ 1000 kg DM/ha) and growth rates are high enough to ensure adequate grass is available in the second rotation. Increased focus must be placed on utilising

SRP combined with a low opening farm cover  $\leftarrow$ 800 kg DM/ha on Feb 1<sup>st</sup>. This was caused by a reduction in pre-grazing herbage mass by 700 kg DM/ha from April 1<sup>st</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>., where a fast SRP was implemented on a low opening farm cover (650 kg DM/ha). When setting SRP length, opening farm cover must be taken into consideration and, more importantly, farm cover and growth rates must be continuously monitored across the spring and adjustments made to the SRP length accordingly, e.g. if growth rates and farm cover are low/below target then SRP length must be extended in order to maintain sufficient grass on farm for the beginning of the second rotation.

grass early in lactation and trying to stimulate high farm grass growth rates earlier (late February/ March). Spreading N to influence spring growth and hitting the grazing targets across the spring period are part of this process. However, farm growth rates and average farm cover must be monitored to ensure that there is sufficient grass available and farm cover remains above 500 kg DM/ha in March. Flexibility in spring grassland management is required and achieving grazing targets is important. Much preparatory work and management must be in place to achieve the benefits of early spring grazing. Autumn and spring pasture management, spring fertilizer application, land type and farm layout all have major implications for the success of spring grazing management.



# Calving preparations for suckler farms

Matthew Halpin IGA council member and beef farmer

The phrase 'fail to prepare, prepare to fail' is particularly apt when it comes to calving time. And while the calving season might still seem like some time away in many farmers' minds, there are a numbers of factors that can be looked at immediately and over the coming weeks to improve your herd's calving performance, as well as making your life easier, next spring.

#### Body condition score (BCS)

The target BCS for a suckler cow is 2.5. Anything above BCS 3.0 puts the animal at a significantly greater risk of having a hard calving, while cows lower than BCS 2.5 can be weaker at calving, have poorer colostrum and subsequent breeding can be delayed. At BSC 2.5, the animal's loin bones and ribs will not be visible but can be felt with light pressure while the tail head will only have a minor level of fat tissue present.

In herds that are not calving until March, there is still time to group thinner cows and offer these a

higher plain of nutrition as well as trimming back fleshy cows by restricting higher quality silage and/ or using straw to buffer feed.. In herds calving early next spring, it is getting late to be making any major dietary adjustments, however, consider giving lower BCS cows an energy boost by offering good quality silage ad-lib or by allocating some high-energy concentrates where silage quality is poor.

#### Nutrition

Pre-calving minerals are absolutely paramount when it comes to the nutritional demands of the cow prior to calving. And the secret to getting the most out of minerals, is to introduce them in ample time before cows are due to calve. Ideally mineral supplementation should commence six to eight weeks prior to calving. If you have had problems with mineral deficiencies in new-born calves in previous years, consider getting a mineral analysis of your silage for a fully balanced mineral/vitamin nutrient plan. However, if buying a powder mineral mix or lick buckets, some of the main ingredients to look out for are magnesium (20-25g/day), phosphorous (4-7g/day), iodine (no more than 60mg/day) and selenium (5-6mg/day). Feeding rates for powdered minerals are usually between 100g and 120g per head per day.

In recent years, supplementing cows with soya bean meal for a month before calving has become more popular. The vast majority of farmers that have started feeding soya in the build up to calving, would say they would never go back to not doing so. Soya bean meal is very high in crude protein (48%). Protein can have a number of functions towards the end of pregnancy. Firstly, protein is essential in digestion, ultimately helping to extract energy from forages. This is particularly important during late pregnancy when 75% of foetal growth takes place. For those aforementioned thinner cows, even getting more protein into the diet to maximise energy uptake from feed would be a good help.

Secondly, supplemental protein can also improve the volume, quality and antibody content of the colostrum, helping the new born calf get off to a good start. Feeding rates are low, with no more than 0.5kg/head/day necessary. This works out at  $\in 0.18$ / day or  $\in 5.40$ /month.

#### **Facilities**

The month or two before calving is the time in which you need to be looking at your facilities. Once the cows start to calve, the chance to make adjustments goes out the window. On most suckler farms, cows will be on slats for the majority of the winter period, and will be taken out to a straw bedded area to calve. Once calved, or indeed immediately before calving, the cow is then moved to a calving pen.

When it comes to calving pens, the more the merrier. A good rule of thumb is to have at least one calving pen for every 15 cows due to calve and, in a more intense calving window, one pen for every 10 cows. If this this isn't the case on your farm, it only exaggerates the need to have all existing ones kitted out to the highest spec possible.

Space is important. Teagasc research shows an area of 14m<sup>2</sup> (4m x 3.5m) is sufficient for a calving pen. Furthermore, all pens should have a facility for feeding roughage (hay/silage) to the cow, along with water. That may be obvious, but many calving pens are only designed in such a way that water and feed must be carried to each individual pen by hand. But consider how much time this takes, particularly if

you have to service a number of different pens in an already busy daily routine. Can a water system and drinkers be plumbed? Can feed be refilled using the tractor?

It also helps greatly to be able to view all calving pens via a calving camera. Where you feel there is a cow on the point of calving, especially at night time, she can be easily monitored and quickly offered assistance if necessary.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, each calving pen should have access to a calving gate. A calving gate will serve a number of key functions in a calving pen. The first one is calving the cow. While we are hoping cows will require minimal assistance, it is highly likely to happen at some point and so we must have a facility to operate a calving jack and even carry out a C-section if necessary.

Next up is feeding the calf. Again, we are hoping most calves will be able to feed themselves but that's not always going to be the case. A calving gate will serve to restrain the cow in order to help a calf suck. And if the calf won't suck, we should be able milk the cow.

What to look for if purchasing a calving gate:

- Three-in-one designs are best when it comes to calving gates. This includes: a quick-release head gate; a hinged inner gate, which swings closed on the cow as she is driven into the head gate; and a small caesarean gate.
- The head gate must be quick-release. If a cow goes down, it can be very hard to get her standing up again and there is high risk of her choking within minutes.
- Most inner gates are slanted up at the end to allow a calf to suck. The calving gate should therefore be hung high enough to allow a calf to suck, even with build-up of straw.
- The inner gate should be held closed on the cow with a strong chain, which should be above the back. Where the chain is lower and a cow goes down while the vet/farmer has their arm inside, the arm could be broken. With the chain on top, the animal is free to back out until the headlock gate prevents her going back any further.
- In larger calving pens, consider a telescopic calving gate to leave it easier to get the cow in.

## Cash-flow Budgets – A Powerful Tool for Running a Profitable Farm

Managing a farm like a business, rather than a lifestyle, is essential to the profitability of all farms. However, ask some farmers to discuss their cashflow position and they may run screaming to the corner and hit the foetal position.

For many farmers, the fear of starting or creating a cashflow for the first time is worse than the reality. However, some may need to engage professional help to get the process up and running and give them the confidence to understand and interpret the results and allow then to take corrective action where needed.

Follow the 7 simple steps below to creating a cash-flow budget:

#### STEP 1:

#### Start with known receipts (money paid in)

These are the receipts which will definitely come into your current account. They will be your Basic Payment Scheme, GLAS payment and ABC payments etc. There could be some variation as to when they come in, but, in most cases, it is best to put down when they were received into your accounts last year (check bank accounts / payment statement dates).

#### STEP 2: Project your income

Dairy farmers should estimate the volume of milk they will sell, and the price received.

Cattle farmers should draw up a selling plan for the year. This may change depending on prices, but it will allow you to make a start and review throughout the year.

You know the stock numbers, so you need to estimate what month you plan on selling animals and how much you are going to get.



Many farmers have other sources of income during the season, and you should include this other farm income if it is likely to be there again for the forthcoming year, e.g. sale of fodder, agricontracting, rental income etc.

#### STEP 3:

#### Work out your expenses (money paid out)

Use your last 2-3 years' set of financial accounts to compare expenditure. When estimating your expenses, remember to allow for increased costs and adjust high costs like fertilizer or feed up or down.

Work through your costs systematically, examining each item of expenditure – it will take some time to complete, but it will be worth the effort to get it as accurate as possible.

You need to include the payment in the months that the money will go out of the current account, not the month when the job or purchase happened. For example, silage may be cut in May, but when do you usually pay the contractor?

#### **STEP 4:** Use your bank statements as a guide

Having a list of annual creditors is useful source of information but you can use last year's invoices/ chequebook to guide you through the payments for the year. Consciously work out if it will be lower or higher this year.

Gather your old bank statements or use online banking apps to help you identify any direct debits or standing orders you have going straight out of your accounts. These payment could be ESB, leasing and HP repayments, credit card, accountancy payments, revenue payments, life cover, etc. Your old bank statement will identify loan repayments collected by financial institution. Update these repayments if you have taken out any new loans or a loan has been repaid.

#### **STEP 5:**

#### Include living expenses.

Estimate how much you will need to live and put this in as a monthly expense. Some farmers have a separate bank account and pay themselves a standing order for living expenses into this personal account each month. This payment of a regular "wage" helps you to budget spending as otherwise, you may tend to underestimate what you're spending on running the household

### STEP 6: Act on the picture.

With a full picture you now must act on what it spells out.

Cash Surplus: Ask yourself how you will use this surplus e.g. invest back in your farm, pay off debt or seek off-farm investment opportunities. These decisions should be made in line with your personal and business goals.

Cash Deficit: Time to ask yourself some hard questions: 1. What is the major issue on the farm? Low production figures resulting in low income; farm working expenses too high; or the financial structure and funding of the business, not right? 2. Do I need to make major or minor changes to make this budget work? These are questions that need to be identified - a day can slip by when you're deliberately avoiding what you are supposed to do!

## STEP 7:

#### Make it a habit.

Once you have set up your cash flow budget, you should look at it at the end of each month. Planning and monitoring allow you to be more pro-active and less reactive - to concentrate more on addressing the root of the problem first. It may be a useful exercise to review your budgeting process; were your targets and forecasts for the year realistic? Were you conservative enough with your figures or maybe overly conservative? When setting targets, base your figures on the last three to five years' production or expenses, look at trends in your expenditure, talk to people in-theknow, and most of all, make sure the numbers look realistic.

#### Top Tips:

- When setting budgets for the farm, it is best to underestimate production figures and other income expectation and overestimate the farm expenses. It is better to be conservative with your budget projections than be overly optimistic.
- When doing your budget prepare three scenarios – best, actual, and stressed budget. Only put the absolute essentials in your stressed budget – this budget may not be sustainable for the long term, but it will help you plan during times of tight cash-flow.
- What external information is available on the marketplace that may help you with your predictions? Look out for commentary from press and other media sources and use these insights to help you forecast your income in your budget as best you can.
- A common mistake that people make is that they will not have allowed for any unexpected capital expenditure in their budget, for example tractor repairs, shed damage etc. Allow for unexpected items that must be replaced or repaired if they break down.
- Budgets prepared without using historical accounts generally over-estimate cash surpluses. You need to be realistic! Past performance is usually an indication of future performance, unless there are exceptional circumstances (unfavourable weather, disease etc.).

Donal O'Leary, **Professional Agri** Photographer and Judge of the #igafbdstudent photo competition 2020

## **#IGAFBDSUDENT** Photo Competition 2020

COVID-19 derailed the plans for our annual 2020 Student Conference. However, in its absence our IGA student committee expertly devised a notable substitute in the form of an interactive photography competition among the student constituency. The photo competition centered on images that best captured the theme "Grassour most important crop". Social media platforms acted as the vehicles for submissions, interactions and discussions. With a generous prize fund attached the competition was a roaring success with over 100 entries submitted from students enrolled in college and university's right across the island of Ireland. Indeed, the competition was also taken up by many of Colleges Agricultural Societies, with their endorsement it became a key activity that successfully generated discussion and debate among their membership and the wider student population, who in the current landscape are completing the majority of their studies remotely.

Professional Agri photographer Donal O'Leary kindly acted as our Judge.

Donal's thoughts on the competition and winning photos are as follows: "Firstly I was honored when asked to act as judge for this competition. It was no easy task given the exceptional standard of images submitted. Nonetheless, it was a really enjoyable experience reviewing and evaluating the various pictures. For my winning images, I was looking for something that stood out immediately in capturing the theme and brief proposed. The photos had to display certain attributes like creativity, planning and most importantly to appreciate the art of photography

in telling and capturing the grassland farming story. Additionally, the images needed to be of a very high guality both technically and compositionally. The winning images ticked all these boxes. Outside of the winning pictures, I also selected notable merit awards across the Dairy, Beef, Sheep and industry farming categories to recognize some of the exceptional entries. In truth, I was totally blown away by the standard, the pictures selected not only showcased the talents of the students but also showed their appreciation and passion for grassland family farming.

1st Prize "Middle Ground": Straight away this photo nailed the brief. Instinctive picture that charters the family farm story. The image evokes themes like importance of family farms as custodians of the grasslands, farm succession and the routine of the grass measurement walk to life and farm business. Magically picture compositionally perfect.

2nd Prize "Sunlight": Timeless image which portrays the interaction of nature, sunlight and grass growth. It's a shot captured in the early morning and this image resonates with farmers back through the generations. Low vantage points and acute awareness of the surroundings enhances a sense of anticipation associated with this unique photo.

3nd Prize "Between a Rock and a Green Place: This image captures the rich heritage of grassland beef farming in West of Ireland. The phrase "in the right place at the right time" comes to mind. Whilst the picture is decisive, the visual landscape backdrop shows the thinking process that underpins this exceptional shot. Postcard image!



As part of our college course we were required to complete 3 months of placement during the spring of this year. I asked to be placed on a large progressive dairy farm and was not disappointed with the outcome as I was placed on a 200-cow leased dairy farm that was run by a farm manager throughout the year. Before I started, we had a meeting to discuss what I wanted to learn and how we could work together to reach my goals. An area I was practically interested in improving was grassland management, so we agreed that I would go on the weekly grass with John and learn how to measure grass using a plate meter. We did our first grass walk in February and I instantly realised it was something that I just couldn't do without on my own farm, So I bought myself a plate meter and set up a grass measuring package online. The first few walks were the hardest but after that I was starting to get more confident at using my eye alongside the plate meter. I Would say at first my father was sceptical of grass measuring but after the first milk cheque arrived, he saw the difference I guess you could say that the numbers spoke for themselves. I found that measuring grass always gave me the confidence to make better decisions like taking out surplus grass for bales and keeping a quality sward in front of the cows. With 41 walks recorded to date we are on track to grow around 14 tons DM/ha this year what helped us in a big way was reseeding 15 % of the grazing platform with Abergain and clover mix we would hope to reseed another 10% next year. What I would like to do going forward is to slowly increase in cow numbers and put a big emphasis on improving on key performance indicators such as 6-week calving percentage and getting more days at grass. I'm excited for peak growth next year as I feel after I have a year of measuring under my belt I will be able to trust in the system more and not be afraid to make more assertive choices in terms of grazing.

My caption for my picture is "Middle ground" I chose this caption as I feel in farming father and father and son often have there disagreements, but for us grass is where we find our middle ground, something we can both agree on is that grass is our most important crop.

> We would like to thank FBD Insurance. who have sponsored this event since its inception in 2010

## 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Graham Dawson "Middle Ground"

My name is Graham Dawson. I am 20 years old and I am currently nearly halfway through my 3rd year of studying agriculture in Cork Institute of Technology. Along with my father we run a small dairy farm in Cork just outside the village of Grenagh. From a young age I was always interested in farming and enjoyed helping my father whenever I got the chance ,but I was never quite set to on the idea of being a dairy farmer for the rest of my life. Until 2 years ago when I took up relief milking for a local dairy farmer, at first it was just a means of making a bit of money while I was in college. But slowly after a while I built up to milking for 3 or 4 farmers and started to love what I was doing, I found it was a great way to learn as you would pick up something new from every farmer and it allowed me to make better decisions on the home farm.





2nd Prize Cian Corcoran Sligo UCD Student

## 2nd Place: Cian Corcoran, Sligo, "Green Gold"

My name is Cian Corcoran and I'm 17. I live on a 160-acre sheep and beef farm in Monasteraden Co. Sligo. Growing up on a farm along the shores of Lough Gara meant the lake was always a part of my life so some of my favourite hobbies are based on the lake such as fishing and kayaking. These hobbies were great to have during lockdown as the lake is nearby, as well as having the place to myself. I am studying 1st year Agricultural Science in UCD. I chose this course as I always had interest in farming from a young age. Doing the variety of jobs on the farm gave me something to do during lockdown and is a great way get a break from the computer and college work. During my course I want to travel for education and for work. When I graduate with my degree I would like to work in the Agricultural sector and one day run my own farm at home with the knowledge and experience gained over the duration of my course. I took this photo, "Green Gold" as it's eye-catching and it's worth sharing the natural beauty of the Irish grassland.



Beef Merit Sarah Armstrong Cavan



3rd Prize Diarmuid Mulkerrins Galway Mountbellew College

## 3rd Place: Diarmuid Mulkerrins Galway Between a rock and a "green" place

I'm 21 years of age from Moycullen, Co. Galway. My father, brother and I contract rear dairy calves, keep drystock and store lambs. Our emphasis is on growing grass (average - 11t DM/ha), I measure the farm 40+ times a year. The farm is all permanent pasture, we focused on improving the soil fertility and next year we plan to reseed some paddocks with multispecies swards. I work with Seán Heffernan providing a weekly grass measuring service to over 25 farmers. My hobbies include farming, sport (mainly GAA Handball) and fishing. I'm a fourthyear 'Agriculture and Environmental Management' student at GMIT/Mountbellew. My final year project is investigating the effect events/paddock has on annual tonnage of dairy farms we measure. In the future, I hope to pursue a career in the agricultural sector possibly after some further studies. I'd enjoy a job related to grass production, the environment and the sustainability of our industry. I entered this striking photo as it highlights our focus on rotational grazing as a foundation for a low cost, sustainable grass-based system while also capturing the unique stone walls associated with farms in the west of Ireland.



Sheep Merit Kate Purcell Kilkenny

We would like to thank FBD Insurance, who have sponsored this event since its inception in 2010



Industry Merit Phil Hendy Kildare



Dairy Merit Ciara Byers Cavan



## **JOE BRUTON** President Irish Grassland Association 1968-69

Matthew Joseph Bruton, known as Joe, was a leading figure in Irish agriculture for many decades. He farmed in Dunboyne, Co Meath and mainly supplied beef to butchers in Dublin. A founder and lifelong member of the NFA/IFA, Joe was a leading figure in the farmers' rights campaigns in the mid-1960's. He was a former chairman of the IFA Livestock Committee and represented his organisation in Brussels as chairman of the EEC's Beef Advisory Committee, establishing study groups to help the development of the Irish cattle and beef industries within the EEC.

In addition to his membership and presidency of the Irish Grassland Association, Joe Bruton held a range of prominent public positions during his long life. He was a Director of the Dublin Port and Docks Board, serving for many years as chairman. During his membership of the Royal Dublin Society, Joe was president of the Ballsbridge-based organisation's Agricultural Committee. In the 1960s, he was a member of the board of the newly established Agricultural Research Institute (now Teagasc) whose work has helped to transform the face of Irish farming during the last 50 years. Displaying his wide range of interests, the Meath-man also held membership of the Agricultural Economics Society of Ireland and was a former president of the Irish Bee-**Keepers Association.** 

Locally, Joe Bruton was a true community activist. For most of his life he was involved in community activities in Dunboyne, including a major fund-raising drive for the parish church and the local community council.

Joe Bruton's thoughts on a wide range of issues, both agricultural and other, were well

known to the many readers of his column in the Irish Farmers Journal which he wrote weekly for twenty-five years. He was an equally skilful broadcaster and was a regular on RTE radio and television programmes in the 1960s and 1970s when farming issues were more prominently publicised in the broadcast media. Known as a man who enjoyed classical music and reading, Joe was a fluent French speaker and spoke passable German.

Joe Bruton's farming prowess was widely recognised both in Ireland and internationally and his farm regularly hosted groups from home and abroad. As might be expected of a former IGA president, Joe Bruton's grassland management and cattle production standards were exemplary. He was a key figure in the introduction of Charolais and Limousin beef cattle into Ireland, recognising the superior beefing qualities of the breeds.

At the time of his death in 2009, Joe Bruton was cited by former IGA and IFA President Padraig Walshe as "one of the leading beef farmers of his generation and recognised as a supreme innovator. During his time in IFA, he represented the interests of farmers and played an important role in the development of the Association". Fine Gael Taoiseach Enda Kenny said: "Joe made an indelible imprint on Irish society, most particularly in the farming community." Joe Bruton's two sons, John and Richard, held prominent positions in Fine Gael and in Irish governments over many years.

Joe Bruton: born March 2nd 1909, died February 27th 2009.

(Compiled by Matt O' Keeffe, IGA Council member and Editor Irish Farmers Monthly).

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