

Programme for the day

Venue: Jimmy Madigan, Ballyhale,
Co. Kilkenny, R95 W407

Date: 14th June 6.30pm – 8.30pm

6.30pm Assembly & Light Refreshments

7.00pm Opening Address

Welcome & opening of beef event
Christy Watson,
President of the Irish Grassland Association

Topics to be covered

- Introduction & farm overview
- Breeding & animal performance
- Approach to grassland management
- Reducing the dependency on chemical nitrogen of Irish beef farms
 - James Humphreys, Research Officer, Teagasc
- Beef, feed, fertiliser & energy market outlook and where to now in the midst of rising costs
 - Phelim O'Neill, Market Intelligence & EU Specialist, Irish Farmers Journal

8.30pm Close of event

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**Irish Grassland
Association**

BEEF FARM WALK

CO. KILKENNY

14TH JUNE

6:30PM – 8:30PM



Photographs will be taken at all events and occasionally published.

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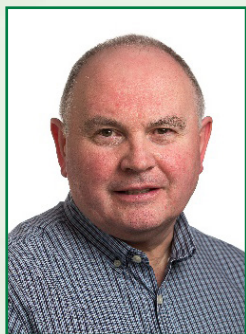


Event Speakers



James Humphreys, Research Officer, Teagasc

James Humphreys is principal research officer with Teagasc. He has been leading dairy systems research at Solohead Research Farm for many years with a focus on low input pasture-based systems and 25 years of experience of using legumes in grassland.



Phelim O'Neill, Market Intelligence & EU Specialist, Irish Farmers Journal

Born and raised on, and still involved with, a small farm in Co. Tyrone, Phelim graduated in Law from Queens University Belfast and holds a Master's in Business Strategy from Ulster University. He joined the Irish Farmers Journal in 2015 and covers: international markets and EU affairs; the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); and trade negotiations that impact on farming and the food industry.

Prior to the Farmers Journal, his entire working career has been spent around the meat industry. Phelim worked in Omagh Meats in a variety of roles for 11 years, then moving to the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC). He also held the role of Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA) - the Trade Association for meat factories in NI.

Farmer Profile: Jimmy Madigan



Located in Ballyhale, Co. Kilkenny, Jimmy Madigan farms some tillage land, forestry and 76ha of grassland - home to a herd of 100 autumn- and spring-calving cows and their followers. Jimmy and his wife - Ann-Marie - are the only labour units on the holding, with plenty of help coming in the years ahead from their children: Hannah; Jim; Kate; and Eddie. The cows and heifers calve from December to March, and from August to September each year. Replacements - sired by a maternal Charolais stock bull - are chosen from the crop of heifers from cows that calve in autumn, and the remainder are aimed to be finished at 19-20 months. Males are brought to beef in an under 16-month finishing system; additional bought-in bulls are also finished in the same system. The Kilkenny-based farmer moved away from steer beef in 2017 in order to grow the breeding herd on the farm - as the under 16-month bull system leads to bulls been wintered for one season only.

Furthermore, a good relationship with a dairy farming neighbour allows Jimmy to purchase several Limousin dairy-cross yearling heifers each year, which he calves down in the autumn time to the maternal Charolais stock bull; heifers obtained here will enter his spring-calving herd. He also uses Limousin AI on his home-bred heifers, and these calve in the springtime all going to plan. Two terminal Charolais stock bulls are run with the spring herd during the breeding season. While this breeding strategy may differ from the norm, it is something that has worked well for Jimmy down through the years. In 2021, James' calving interval stood at 369 days with an impressive 0.9 calves/cow/year.

For Jimmy, focusing on cows that have an ample supply of milk to feed their calves and utilising as much grass as

Farmer Profile: Jimmy Madigan

possible has always been the key to success. The herd is grazed in an 18-paddock system - operating in a 'grow in three weeks, eat in three days' system. The paddocks are serviced by excellent roadways which make the route to pasture as labour-free as possible. With an early turnout in spring, Jimmy takes advantage of the long grazing season prior to weaning. Pre-weaning, spring-born bulls are crept fed, while heifers are fed no meal. Bulls are then housed in November; however, heifers return to grass and are grazed until weather forces housing. In 2021, the males had an ADG to 200 days of 1.32kg/day, while their heifer comrades had a ADG of 1.2kg/day.

While grazed grass is Jimmy's number one priority during the growing season, excellent-quality silage is harvested to ensure high growth rates during the winter and finishing period. He maintains that without excellent-quality grass silage, the under-16-month bull system would be hard to operate. Last year's silage crop came back at 76% DMD when tested - allowing the weanlings to achieve a 0.54kg/day growth rate for the first two months of housing. Regular weighing complements the beef system and once bulls hit the target weight of 480kg, they are then moved into the finishing regime. In terms of slaughter, 2021-killed bulls had an average carcass weight of 425kg, while the heifers averaged 347kg - with 89% of the feed coming from grass or grass silage.

To achieve this top-quality silage, Jimmy harvests his own silage with a mower, tedder, baler and wrapper. The same land is never cut year-on-year and ground earmarked for silage is grazed off early in the year, with 2,500 gallons/ac of slurry applied. At the start of March, chemical fertiliser is applied and - once the weather allows in May - it is harvested. Reseeding, along with keeping soil fertility at optimal levels, has also played a pivotal role on the farm over the years, with most ground reseeded in the last decade. Jimmy is now ready to explore the different options available when it comes optimising nitrogen efficiency and plans to sow clover this spring.

He believes that for suckler-to-beef farming to be successful, there are a menu of criteria that must come together - number one being grass and top-quality silage. He also highlights adequate facilities - especially with a bull finishing system; and a fertile, milky cow that can produce and rear a calf every year.