

# Irish Grassland Association

Members' Information Booklet

Issue No. 51. 2023



**“To advance the knowledge of good grassland management in Irish farming”**





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



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## Editorial



Michael Egan  
Editor and IGA Council Member

### Welcome to the IGA Spring 2023 Information newsletter.

Welcome to our first issue of 2023 and a coming year full of live events! Since our last publication, all the various committees of the association have been busy arranging events for the coming year. As usual we have a full review from our Dairy conference and member's event held in January. The Sheep, Beef and Dairy summer tour committees have been working hard and will give a preview of events planned for the coming months. Meanwhile in Section 3, we hear for the final time from our 'Year in My Wellies' contributors – Lauren Claffey and Edel O'Connor, they fill us in on how they have survived the past few busy months on their dairy and sheep enterprises and balancing their busy college work and PhD trial work.

Farmers have always been a central part of our newsletter and in this edition we are lucky to have articles from sheep and dairy farms on how they have incorporated multispecies swards into their farming systems in recent years and the management practices they have put in place. We

hear from Philip and Jonathan Higgins sheep's farms in Sligo on how they are using multispecies swards as part of the finishing systems of lambs in summer. And also Martin Ryan a dairy farmer in Tipperary and how multispecies swards are helping him overcome summer drought.

With increasing environmental pressures on Irish Agriculture, we hear from advisors in the Teagasc ASSAP program on the current Irish water quality status and steps farmers can take to help maintain and improve water quality on their farm. One such strategy that can help improve water quality but also farm profitability is to improve soil fertility and incorporate red clover into our silage swards, we hear from Philip Cosgrave agronomists with Yara on investing in your soil and key actions you can take to improve nitrogen use efficiency through improved soil fertility. We also hear Nicky Byrne a researcher in Teagasc Grange on the role of red clover in swards, and the establishment practices and optimal management of red clover silage swards.

We have an article from Embrace Farm on dealing with the 'Support after the unexpected', it is not something people would ever hope to use, Embrace FARM is positioned to support farm families after a sudden death or injury has occurred on the family farm (email [info@embracefarm.com](mailto:info@embracefarm.com)).

Finally we included an Archive biography of the past president of the IGA Pdraig Walshe who sadly passed away earlier this year. Pdraig was the president of the IGA from 1996 - 1997, and was a very significant figure for Irish agriculture for many years.

Michael Egan,  
Editor IGA publication.

### 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](mailto:office@irishgrassland.ie). We would love to hear from you!





## IGA Members Event 2023

Liz Duffy  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



The IGA Members event, sponsored by Yara, was held on the evening of 17th Jan 2023 prior to the Dairy Conference in the Charleville Park Hotel. This pre-conference networking and social event proved to be hugely popular and was very well attended. The headline subject for the night was an issue that impacts on every generation of farmers regardless of scale or enterprise; Succession.

The format for the event was a highly convivial and engaging discussion hosted by Paul Hyland, Dairy Farmer, former council member and past President of the IGA and the special guest was Aisling Meehan, Agricultural Solicitor. Aisling first outlined that her background as the daughter of award-winning Dairy farmers, Solicitor, Tax Consultant and young trained farmer coupled with her many years in practice has given her huge insight into the myriad of issues, both emotional and financial, she has encountered as she leads her clients through the process of succession planning.

The conversation opened with the critical starting point of how discussions should be framed within the family. A family farm is first and foremost an asset-rich business

and the central principal aim of succession is that it can retain its inherent profitability. Family dynamics and expectations need to be carefully managed to ensure the desired outcomes can be achieved. The earlier these discussions can happen the better for all parties involved. Problems and stumbling blocks arise due to lack of communication between the retiring generation and those potentially stepping into their shoes. Third party mediators should be involved where needed to progress discussions. Aisling outlined that an up-to-date will is critical to ensure wishes of the family members are known, and that it can be executed and non-farming members of the family feel they have had a voice at the table.

Aisling guided the audience through several family scenarios she has dealt with and how tax laws and reliefs available can be managed to ensure a tax-efficient, timely transfer of farm land and business. Concerns of the retiring generation can range from their future security in terms of income, the farm house and their possible wishes to be financially independent from the business they are stepping away from. The younger generation need to see a viable income and future business potential to meet their future goals and

needs. The popularity of registered farm partnerships and young farmer grants and incentives has encouraged and allowed the next generation to move into and evolve their role in the farm business. Farm partnerships have been an excellent vehicle in allowing both generations show their commitment to the future of the business while allowing farming expertise to be handed between the generations. In cases where there are none or no

clear successors, alternative collaborative farming should be investigated.

'Communication, communication, communication' was one of the clear take home messages Paul highlighted to close the discussion. Early and on-going discussions between all parties that are involved in the farm succession plan are essential.

Aisling's messages were hugely insightful and she clearly showed the pathway through a smooth and fair succession plan is possible thereby ensuring there will be no legacy issues for the next generation and any mistakes of the past will not be replicated.



*L-R Paul Hyland IGA Past President and Dairy Farmer from Laois who facilitated the night with Eva Ross Yara event sponsors, Aisling Meehan Agri Solicitor / guest speaker along with Vincent Griffith IGA Dairy Conference Chairperson and Dairy Farmer from Sligo*

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Speakers from the IGA Dairy Conference, IGA council and Yara event sponsors.

## Dairy Conference Review 2023

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA Council Member  
and Yara



After two years of disruption, this year's Irish Grassland Association Dairy Conference moved back to its usual slot in the IGAs event calendar. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, the Charleville Park Hotel was once again the venue for a packed event where delegates listened to a very interesting and engaging line-up of speakers that the hard working Dairy Conference organising committee had planned under the able stewardship of Vincent Griffith the committee chair.

Every Dairy Conference has a theme and this year's theme was 'Dairy Farming in a New Era'. The focus was on the changing practices required at farm level to farm successfully in a rapidly changing world. Because dairy farms have been given ambitious targets to meet both from a water quality and greenhouse gas emissions perspective, they will have to rapidly adapt to new farm practices and technologies. All seven speakers on the day shared with us their latest research, insight and expertise on how dairy farms can navigate this new era.

To delve deeper into this general theme, the organisers ran three sessions with the following focus:

- Where to from here?
- Technologies to future proof dairy farming
- Productive swards in a low nitrogen era

### Session 1 – Where to from here?

For the first session, chaired by Patrick Gowing (IGA council member & Teagasc), where he was joined by Noreen Lacey of IFAC, and David Fennelly, dairy farmer. Noreen's analysis of a 'worst case scenario' on a higher yielding herd currently in nitrates derogation and farming 40 ha, with 112 cows, really brought the impending regulatory changes home for many delegates. When yield banding and the proposed lowering of the whole farm organic nitrogen loading were included, cow numbers would shrink to 83, which would result in a drop in income of 53% from current levels.

Noreen then offered two possible mitigation strategies to avoid this massive drop in income, one of which was to rent extra land, the second to reduce milk supply to fit into a lower yield band. Renting land at €750/ha had the least impact on lowering income levels (5%) in her economic analysis, while lowering milk supply was the least attractive option (23%). However it was strongly highlighted that all farmers need to look at their own system and make a decision that is most suitable to their system, and reducing milk supply or renting land may be an option to them.

David Fennelly followed who farms outside Emo, Co. Laois. David outlined how the farm has developed over the last decade from a mixed dairy farm to a dairy only enterprise now running 260 cows. David outlined how

his farm is changing and adopting new practices. A key driver of profitability he pointed out was herbage production. He is now including white clover, multi-species and red clover swards in a bid to reduce nitrogen inputs. These swards have also resulted in many more flowering species in early summer for pollinators. David is proactive in protecting existing habitats, and plans to identify new habitats to develop in the coming years. The farm's breeding strategies have also changed, there will be a greater emphasis on the Commercial Beef Value figure when choosing beef sires for AI to increase potential performance and carcass value of his non-replacement offspring and breeding a more efficient cow, where there will be an emphasis on milk solid percentages and higher maintenance values.

### Session 2 – Technologies to future proof dairy farming

Matt Dempsey (IFJ) chaired this session, where Dr John Upton from Teagasc presented a paper on reducing energy use on dairy farms. He stated that the average cost of electricity on Irish dairy farms is €12 per 1,000 litres of milk produced. With a variation of €7.50 to €14.00 per 1,000 litres produced, or from €38 to €70 per cow per year. Milk cooling makes up the largest portion (31%) of the cost, followed by water heating (23%) and then milking machine (20%). Changing energy supplier was one quick and easy win for farmers, the second was installing a night rate meter. The next area to look into is reducing electricity consumption, by up to 60% through the installation of a milk pre-cooler (plate cooler), heat recovery system (pre-heating water), VSD motors (variable speed drives on milking machine) and a Solar Photovoltaic (PV) system (solar panels that generate on-site electricity). These measures could save over €3,600 per year on a 100 cow farm and save 10 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.

Francis Nolan who is dairying in Coolcullan, Co. Kilkenny spoke next, outlining how he is incorporating new technology on his farm. He stressed that having all the basics in place and working should be the first priority, before investing in technology. Some of the technology that Francis has employed includes activity collars and a drafting system which has made life easier for Francis, and his excellent herd breeding performance indicates it must be working. The robotic scraper installed in 2020, has worked very well. There is no build-up of slurry, and the cows are cleaner which is contributing to lower rates of mastitis and lameness while cows are in-doors. Other

investments that have either saved him time or money have been his automatic calf feeder and solar panels. The return-on-investment on the latter was 5-7 years but now that has nearly halved given current energy prices.

### Session 3 – Productive swards in a low nitrogen era

The final session was chaired by Dr Karina Pierce (IGA council member & UCD), where Dr Michael Dineen gave us an A to Z of red clover swards, from the why to the how. Distilled down, red clover inclusion in grass silage swards has the potential to improve the economic, environmental and societal sustainability of dairy systems. But Michael was quick to point out that these swards require a higher level of management. On-going research it is hoped will develop blue-prints to increase the robustness and simplicity of red clover grass silage production systems. Importantly red clover silage generally maintains or improves production performance of lactating dairy cows. A number of management factors are key to the successful establishment, persistency and production of these swards, namely seed selection, sowing rate and date, soil fertility and fertiliser applications, weed control and finally harvesting and grazing management.

Dr Michael Egan took to the lectern next, updating delegates on the latest trial work on spring nitrogen applications, demonstrating that nitrogen fertiliser can be reduced by up to 30 kg N/ha in spring (60 vs 90 kg N/ha), spread in February and March (33 and 66%, respectively), with minimal impact on spring grass production, and can result in significant reductions in nitrate leaching. Mike then went on to outline the latest spring grazing management guidance and why increased spring grass availability allows for higher daily grass allowances which has positive effects on early lactation dry matter intake and animal performance.

Robert O'Dea a dairy farmer from Limerick, who farms in partnership with his brother and nephew, milking 259 cows on a 116 ha milking platform spoke with Karina about his journey to lower his nitrogen usage by incorporating white clover in his paddocks. Robert has reduced his chemical nitrogen fertiliser from 234 kg/ha in 2020 to 137 kg/ha in 2022. The farm is part of the Teagasc on Clover150 programme led by Michael Egan, allowing the O'Dea's to access technical support which has been key to their success so far.

We would like to thank our sponsors  
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## Sheep Farm Walk 2023

Fiona McGovern,  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



This year's IGA sheep event sponsored by Mullinahone Co-op will take place On Thursday 18th May on the O'Connell family farm of Eddie, Bernadette and Aidan, Coolygagen Clonbullogue, Co. Offaly. For this year's event we are switching things up a little with the whole event taking place on farm. The event will kick off at 6pm with refreshments served for all in attendance.

### Farm Profile

Father and son team, Eddie and Aidan, farm a total of 90 Ha, 65 Ha of owned land plus an additional 25 Ha of rented ground. The majority of the farm is grassland based however there is 15 Ha of tillage which is used to provide feed for finishing animals. There are two main enterprises on the Connell farm: a 400 ewe mid-season lambing flock and a bull beef operation. At any one time there are approximately 200 head of cattle on the farm.

The ewe flock consists predominantly of Borris ewes, a maternal Cheviot X Suffolk for those less familiar. To help simplify their system, the Connells do not keep any replacement ewe lambs, with replacements purchased as hogget ewes. As such all ewes lamb down for the first time as 2 year olds. Texel rams are used across all ewes with particular attention paid to the genetic potential of the sire at purchase. Eddie and Aidan have

consistently chosen five star rams, using the Sheep Ireland Euro-star indexes as an additional tool in their armour when buying rams.

Over the past number of years the sheep enterprise has had a scanning rate of 1.8-1.9 lambs per ewe joined to the ram with all lambs finished on farm. Unfortunately, when ewes were pregnancy scanned in December of this year the Connell's were disappointed with a scan rate of 1.65 lambs per ewe joined. While this is still above the national average, it is below the target for this farm. When speaking with Eddie and Aidan they explained that the farm suffered from the drought in summer 2022 which limited the build-up of grass for flushing ewes pre mating.

The Connell's farm will be the main focus of our IGA sheep farm walk this year. Grazing management is a priority for both Eddie and Aidan. The 75 Ha of grassland is divided into permanent paddocks with mains electric fence and water available in all paddocks. The average paddock size is 4.5 acres (~2 Ha). Paddocks are further sub-divided using temporary electric fence where necessary during the grazing season. The Connell's are strong advocates for mixed grazing with the cattle and sheep grazing together when and where possible. Eddie believes that this contributes to achieving better

grass utilisation and animal performance compared to grazing animals separately.

Lamb rearing and finishing from a mainly grass based diet is a major objective for both Eddie and Aidan, with little or no meal used in most years. All lambs are reared on ewes, where possible, with cross fostering of triplet lambs on to single ewes a priority at lambing. Lambs are weaned in mid-June to coincide with the availability of after grass from first cut silage. The aim is to have the majority of lambs sold off farm by September, at which point weanlings are purchased for the bull beef enterprise and ewes get preference for grass pre-mating. This system works very successfully for the Connell's with on average 1.6-1.65 lambs sold per ewe joined per year.

Investigating in labour efficiency is a goal shared by both Eddie and Aidan. The erection of a new sheep shed in 2018 has made life a lot easier for the Connell family, particularly at lambing time. This, combined with a sheep handling unit saves time while also making it easier to work with animals as and when required.

The Connell farm is a high output and efficient farm system. It is a mixed farming operation with a large mid-season ewe flock, a bull beef system and some tillage which is used to provide winter feed and straw. Grass is central to the farm operation, with the majority of lambs sold off grass by September with little or no meal, and grass used to maximise weight gain on the bulls.

The Irish Grassland Association is hugely indebted to Mullinahone Co-op their support of our 2023 Sheep Conference. Speaking on behalf of the sponsors Martin Ryan from Mullinahone Co-op said "We at Mullinahone Co-op are delighted to support the IGA since the outset and in particular their sheep conference as it allows sheep farmers to look at efficient and sustainable production systems that will help overcome the challenges which will inevitably face sheep farmers over the next decade".

Our event is free and open to everyone. Further information can be found on [www.irishgrassland.ie](http://www.irishgrassland.ie) or you can phone Maura at 087-9626483. We are looking forward to seeing you all there.



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sponsors Mullinahone Co-Op  
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L-R Alan Kelly IGA President, Donal Riordan FBD event sponsor and Chris McCarthy host farmer

## Beef Event 2023

Declan Marren  
IGA Council Member  
and Aurivo



The 2023 Irish Grassland Association Beef Event heads to Westmeath this year to the farm of Chris McCarthy in Crookedwood N91FX22 just north of Mullingar. The farm walk takes place on Tuesday, June 13<sup>th</sup> at 6.30pm.

### Farm profile

The McCarthys farm is made up of 28 ha of relatively free-draining soil and has the added advantage of being on one block. The farm is home to a spring-calving herd comprised of 46 Limousin cows mated primarily to terminal Charolais stock bulls. Alongside the commercial herd, Chris runs a small number of pedigree Charolais cows which provides stock bulls for his own use as well as selling a number of breeding stock each year. The current stock bull is a Doonally New (CF52) bred bull with Chris having a fondness for other Charolais stalwarts such as Pirate (PTE). When he combines these terminal genetics with his three-quarter bred, red Limousin cow, the results speak for themselves with outstanding quality suckler stock being bred on the farm, consistently over the past number of years. Chris said "it has to be a red Limousin, I used to operate with the odd black Limousin cow but in terms of delivering what we want here, I have moved solely to red cows over the past few years."

Historically, replacements were purchased as in-calf

heifers from one or two sources but Chris found that these were getting more and more expensive and so he has since moved to bringing in maiden heifers over the past two years. "I was sourcing them from the same farm every year for a number of years but I have had to move around in the last few years in order to get the type of stock I want. It is something that is getting harder and harder to find all the time."

The farm is quite heavily stocked and in the past Chris has been in derogation but now operates just below 170 kg N/ha each year. This high stocking rate helps to drive the output/ha ultimately driving the profitability of the farm. Calving starts the first week of February and is typically finished by mid-March. In 2021 there was an issue with a sub-fertile bull which has resulted in the calving spread increasing slightly over the past two years but it is something that Chris is working on pulling back quite quickly. "There was a big turnover of cows that year, we increased the length of the breeding season slightly but still there were 18 cows not in calf and they were all culled. I am working off farm full-time so I need calving to be compact and have it over with. We have made big progress last year and I would hope to do the same again this breeding season and be back to a six or seven-week calving season in the next couple of years."

### Grazing season

Cows and calves start to be turned out to grass in small numbers as soon as the weather conditions allow which is typically around the 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> of February with around the 10<sup>th</sup> of March being the mean date for turnout. The grazing infrastructure on the farm is simple but effective. Chris can move a batch of stock singlehandedly anywhere on the farm. He says that stock are used to getting a move to fresh grass and so he can lead them to new grass when they need a move. There are a number of farm tracks and there are 10 or 12 temporary fence reels that Chris uses to make passages through paddocks if needed. Everything needs to be able to be done by one person. Good genetics combined with excellent grassland management is key to high growth rates in calves over the first season at grass. Chris was a member of the Teagasc/Irish Farmers Journal BETTER farm programme where he gained his grassland management skills. "I enjoyed measuring grass, it really did give you confidence that you were ok to take out a paddock or show you where there was a deficit coming in a couple of weeks' time."

The system in place could be described as being simple, but very effective. Being busy off farm means that every hour on the farm needs to be productive. Chris estimates he spends around 15 hours per week on the farm across the entire year. The biggest workload is obviously in winter and during the calving season but Chris is slow to handle cows at calving if they don't need it. "I have cameras on the phone that I can watch the cows on. I like to leave them alone as much as possible. Only when there is no progress being made will I handle a cow, and so far this year I only have assisted one cow calving."

### Bull-beef system

One change implemented since finishing in the BETTER farm programme is the move from a weanling trading system to an under 16-month, bull beef operation. At weaning, which takes place in late September, bull calves are typically 350 kg to 360 kg. They are fed meal two weeks pre- and for four weeks post-weaning and once housed in November they start on 2 kg of ration which increases to 4 kg by the New Year. This then moves to 6 kg by 1<sup>st</sup> of February and ad lib by the 1<sup>st</sup> of March.

### EVENT SPEAKERS



Eoin Ryan MVB, MVM,  
DipECBHM, PCertBI



Aidan Murray,  
Teagasc

There has been an increased focus on silage quality on the farm over the last number of years also with Chris seeing it as a key way to reduce the total amount of meal fed to bulls. Currently, they are consuming around 1.8 t/head lifetime of concentrate. These bulls are achieving big weights at under sixteen months with average carcass weights around 460 kg. These animals are going on the grid and are typically grading U+ for conformation and 2+ on average for carcass fat score. Chris is obviously working closely with his processor to ensure the market is there for this type of stock each year.

The farm walk will highlight the key components of the system around soil fertility and grassland management, genetics, labour requirements and financial performance.

Also on the day, there will be a focus on animal health with University College Dublin vet Eoin Ryan discussing what farmers need to do on suckler-to-beef farms in terms of keeping animals healthy. Teagasc's Aidan Murray will also be on hand discussing the factors that make Chris's system both profitable and sustainable.

The event is kindly sponsored by FBD which the IGA hugely appreciates as without such support events such as this simply wouldn't be possible. Speaking ahead of the event, Donal Riordan, from FBD said: "We at FBD are delighted to support the IGA Beef Event in 2023 as it allows beef farmers to look at efficient and sustainable production systems that will help overcome the challenges which will inevitably face farmers over the next decade."

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## IGA Dairy Extravaganza Day 1: Farm Walk & Steak BBQ Night

John Farrell  
IGA council member  
and AIB



The first day of our Dairy Extravaganza is kindly sponsored by Yara and will incorporate a farm visit to the farm of Mark Cassidy in Kells eircode A82YP57 at 4pm, followed by a social Steak BBQ Night with music in the Headfort Arms Hotel Kells Co Meath. Commenting on the first day, Philip Cosgrave, Yara said *"We are delighted to be associated with this event organised by the Irish Grassland Association. We are looking forward to an excellent farm visit to Mark Cassidy and a very enjoyable social gathering with members that evening."*

### Mark Cassidy

Mark Cassidy is farming in Kells, Co. Meath. The Cassidy farm has calved 390 cows in 2023. The farm is a spring calving crossbred herd which produced 509Kgs of milk solids per cow in 2022. The farm is 153Ha, with a milking platform of 115Ha. The EBI of the herd is €207 and has a 6-week calving rate of 83%. Heifer calves are contract reared and have been done so by the same farmer for the past 6 years.

Mark returned home to full time farming in the mid

1990's. At that stage the farm was milking 40 cows and supplying a liquid milk contract. The farm has grown considerably in recent years, and it has done so maximising the use of grazed grass in the diet. Mark started measuring grass in the mid 2000's, and the farm while affected by drought last year, grew 12.8t DM/ha.

The farm can be best described as a labour efficient farm. Good structure, defined roles and a recognition of the importance of work-life-balance are key to the farm. It was Mark's time abroad, before he returned to full time farming in Ireland that shaped his farming philosophy and how he would set up his farm for the future. Having worked on farms in the Netherlands and in New Zealand he got to witness first-hand the benefits of a structured work week and the importance of work life balance for staff, who would return refreshed after their weekends away from the farm.

Mark has two full time staff on the farm David and Sarah, who have both been with him for the past two years. There is additional support at calving for c. 10 weeks and relief milking is provided by students.

A staff meeting takes place every Tuesday on the farm where priority items for the week ahead and items of note are discussed. Sarah and David have defined roles

on the farm with each undertaking one milking per day. The farm has standard operating procedures (SOP's) in place for all farm activities which are contained with the farm manual. The farm manual is to support all staff on the farm, to outline how tasks should be completed on the farm and to ensure there is no ambiguity.

Mark is always looking into ways of incorporating technology to streamline the system on his farm. Anything that will enable him or the team working on the farm to carry out their tasks remotely or with the use of automation is an area of interest to him. Mark sees the advances in technology as a way to continue to improve his farm and make it a nicer, easier and smarter place to work.



Mark Cassidy

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## IGA Dairy Extravaganza Day 2: Dairy Summer Tour



**Liz Duffy**, IGA council member and Teagasc  
**Eamon Sheehan**, IGA council member and farmer  
**John Farrell**, IGA council member and AIB

The IGA Summer Tour is heading to the North East for 2023. The event will be hosted by two excellent farms in the Cavan area, David Brady and Owen Brodie. Farms in this area can face a specific set of challenges from farm fragmentation to dealing with high rainfall and difficult soils. The day will focus on how our two hosts have adapted these principles to their own circumstances and we will be guided through the development of their family farm businesses, highlighting key milestones and what success means for them.

Commenting at the launch of this year's Summer Tour, Barry Hyland, AIB Agri Advisor said, *'AIB is delighted to continue our long association with the IGA Dairy Summer tour. As always, the IGA has identified two excellent host farmers for this year's event. Farming in this area can be more challenging than in other parts of the country, and as such, the focus on grass and cows is even more important. I am looking forward to hearing both the Brady and Brodie stories and how they have developed their farms over the years to overcome some of these challenges.'*

### David Brady

David Brady is farming in Tierlahood, Stradone, Co. Cavan. The Brady Family business consists of both a Dairy and Poultry (free-range eggs) business. David returned home to farm with the initial focus on the poultry side of the business. At the time, his parents Brian and Daphne were milking 30 cows. Steady growth over the years has developed the dairy business to a milking herd of 110 cows carried on the milking platform of 40ha (2.75 LU/ha), the support block of 30ha carries the replacement stock and silage ground. The poultry enterprise (between 2 houses and 15,000 hens) is managed in conjunction with David's brother Kieran, but it is an 'all-hands-on-deck' requirement for labour input most days. David's wife Rachel and their 3 children Eoghan, Daniel and Kate all give time to the farm.

Our main focus for the visit will be on the dairy enterprise but we will discuss how labour is integrated effectively between it and the poultry business. The EBI of the herd is €212 with €63 from milk and €98 fertility. David's cows produced 541Kgs of milk solids

David Brady



in 2022 at 4.44% fat & 3.63% protein and a SCC of 94K. Feed input per cow was 1.2t. Fertility performance in 2022 was excellent with text-book KPI's of 363 day calving interval, 82% 6-week calving rate with 100% of the heifers calved at 24 months. David's key focus had been on driving milk solids production through a combination of breeding for fertility and kilos of fat & protein using high EBI genomic sires while also a key focus on cow selection.

In 2015 David joined the Teagasc Heavy Soils Programme and the Irish Farmers Journal Dairylink programme. At this time David also began grass measuring and began the steady development of the grassland productivity and grass utilisation on the farm. The key areas of grassland management we will discuss with David in July will be:

- Land improvement & his approach to drainage
- Major emphasis on soil fertility
- Reseeding & clover incorporation
- Infrastructure to achieve high grass utilisation

David will highlight his 'grass before cows' approach to steady expansion, his approach to managing the growth capability of the land and the appropriate stocking rate for his system. Central to this has been David's attitude to testing the boundaries of what is possible on a farm of challenging soil type in a high rainfall area while also dealing with land fragmentation. David has adapted a successful system of grass production and utilisation and is critically producing grazing swards of high quality on a consistent basis. The shoulders of the year pose their own problems and if are not dealt with have knock-on effects for both grass quality and cow performance. David will share his strategy to deal with this on the day. Overall we look forward to hearing how David and his family have evolved and developed a successful, profitable farm and what the key priorities for future developments will be.

Owen Brodie



### Owen Brodie

Owen Brodie is farming with his family at Ryefield, Virginia, Co. Cavan on the shores of Lough Ramor. Owen finished school in 1985 before attending Ballyhaise Agricultural College where he completed his Green Cert. He returned home to farm full time in 1989 at the age of 21. At that stage the farm was milking 30 Pedigree Friesian cows supplying a winter milk contract, there was a cheese production facility on the farm as well as 100 sows. The Brodie's were farming 28ha, 20ha of which could be described as good quality.

In the interim period, additional land has been bought and rented, roadways upgraded and the parlour upgraded from a 6 unit initially to a 12 unit and now a 24 unit. Today Owen is farming a total of 77ha, 20ha of which is rented and has a milking platform of 58ha. He milked 205 cows in 2022.

Owen has been contract rearing out his heifers for 12 years, and he is in a long term relationship with the one farmer rearing the heifers for the entire time. There is one full time person employed on the farm in addition to support at calving time.

Land type on the farm is a mix of dry and heavy land. In the early 90's Owen started to measure grass, and put a focus on extending the grazing season. Overall there was 13.8 tonnes of grass DM/ha grown across the whole farm in 2022. Owen has started to incorporate clover into his reseeding programme to reduce his reliance on chemical fertiliser and this will be discussed further on the day.

To coincide with the increased focus on grass, Owen quit winter milk production and began spring calving in 1994. Owen put a big emphasis on cow type to align with the introduction of the A+B-C milk payment system which has paid off for him. His ideal cow is a 550kg, fertile and crossbred cow. The EBI of the herd is €210 with €46 from milk and €91 fertility. Owen's cows



produced 518Kgs of milk solids in 2022 at 4.7% fat & 3.78% protein. Feed input per cow was 1.1t. Fertility performance in 2022 was excellent with a calving interval of 373 days and an 89% 6-week calving rate.

The Brodie farm is an excellent example of a farm achieving high levels of performance under more challenging conditions. As mentioned before, some of the land type is heavy. The farm is long and narrow, with some of the grazing platform over 2.3km from the parlour with steep roadways for the cows to travel on. To access different parts of the grazing platform, cows have to cross two roads, and to access one of the fields cows walk along the road. Land is fragmented, with limited access to additional land in the area to support growth. In this context the growth and performance of the Brodie family farm over time is even more impressive.

**Summary**

Both the Brady and Brodie farm's have had to deal with a number of challenges in developing their farms over the years, similar to other farms in the area. High rainfall, fragmentation and difficult soils to name but a few. However, they both have developed a farm system to suit their own circumstance built on maximising the use of grazed grass in the diet. Join us on the 18th of July to hear first-hand the story of this year's two host farmers.



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**and Steak BBQ Night**



# A Year in my Wellies

Edel O' Connor  
Teagasc Athenry and  
University College Dublin



My name is Edel O' Connor. I am a final year PhD student working on measuring methane output from sheep. On our home farm, I help my brother Aidan and mother Marie run a 200 ewe hill and lowland flock in Co. Kerry.

## Scanning

After the mixed year for our store lamb trade, the uncertainty around lamb prices and rising input costs, it was with a heavy heart that we had to make the decision to let a smaller number of ewes to the ram this year. One hundred and forty ewes were let out to five rams. The majority of ewes not put to the ram were made of smaller hoggets that were given another year to mature or ewes that did not meet the body condition score criteria. These ewes will run dry on the mountain until the following breeding season.

The ewes were scanned in February with a scanned litter size of 1.2. The targeted scanned litter size for a hill flock is from 1.2 to 1.4; meaning that the ewes will carry more singles than twins, this was a decrease of 0.2 from last year. There are two reasons for this reduced scanned litter size, firstly weather conditions at mating were very poor with rain falling for days on end and secondly this inclement weather lasted into the winter, with ewes in poorer condition than hoped at scanning time. After scanning ewes were divided into different groups depending on litter size and body condition. The single bearing ewes go back to the mountain for a few weeks after scanning while the twin bearing ewes and ewes of lower body condition stay on a lower section of the mountain for feeding. To reduce input costs we delayed lambing by two weeks this year to match grass growth with the ewes due to lamb on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. This would be considered a more normal time of year for hill flocks to lamb with the majority of these flocks starting to lamb in mid-April.

## Burning season

This is a tradition that not many outside of the hill farming community are familiar with. Furze or gorse bushes are burnt on the uplands and mountainous areas. These bushes can completely take over an area if not controlled and so they are burned to allow for the growth of feed that can be used by animals grazing these areas. Burning season is open from the 31<sup>st</sup> of

August to the 1<sup>st</sup> of March but in reality the only time suitable for burning is February. With mixed weather in February over the last number of years, it has proved very difficult to get any of level of burning, but we have been very lucky this year that we were able to get a few dry days. When burning there are a few things you need to be careful with, if it is very dry or very windy, the fires can easily get out of control and when burning near forestry extra care needs to be taken. We are lucky on our farm that we have a fire belt running alongside the forestry meaning that it would be very difficult for the fire to jump from the furze bushes to the forest.

## PhD

I am now in the final few months of my PhD where I am starting to write up my thesis. In my previous articles, I described the two methods I have used to estimate methane output in sheep, portable accumulation chambers and the sulphur hexafluoride tracer technique. I am now analysing the data and writing the final chapter for my thesis, which followed the same group of animals throughout their lifetime as lambs, hoggets and ewes. Methane measurements were taken using portable accumulation chambers and dry matter intake was estimated using the n-alkane technique when animals were at grass and using individual pens indoors where silage was weighed in and out to animals daily. Feed intake is one of the main drivers of methane output so it is very important to measure both traits at the same time. Preliminary results from my study showed that lactating ewes had the highest dry matter intake compared to all other life-stages, averaging 2.10 kg DM/day. For every one kg increase in live-weight of the animal, dry matter intake increased by 0.01 kg DM/day. Similar to dry matter intake, lactating ewes also produced the highest methane output with the pregnant ewes producing the least. Portable accumulations chambers will not give the absolute methane output values so in my further analysis I will be looking at the ranking of the animals as high or low methane emitters and does the animal consistently rank the same throughout their lifetime.

This will be my last article for A Year in my Wellies. I really enjoyed writing the articles and I would like to thank the Irish Grassland Association for the opportunity. I hope you enjoyed reading them.

# A Year in my Wellies

Lauren Claffey  
Dairy farmer and  
University College Dublin



My name is Lauren Claffey. I'm a 4<sup>th</sup> year Dairy Business student in UCD. We have a dairy farm at home in Co. Westmeath, milking 220 cows with my Dad and brother. I'm in college during the week and work on the farm every weekend. The herd is currently averaging 24 kg at 4.85% butterfat and 3.59% protein on 5.5kgs meal with 70% of the herd calved in early March.

## College

This year in college we have returned to the UCD campus after studying from home with COVID for 2<sup>nd</sup> year, and completing my professional work experience placement on a dairy farm in the UK and studying in Teagasc, Moorepark in Fermoy, Co. Cork for the remainder of 3<sup>rd</sup> year. It's great to be back for our final year of study with the broader Ag Science groups and a few trips to Ryan's as the weekends are spent catching up on jobs at home! As part of our final year of modules we have studied animal nutrition, animal breeding, farm business management, Ag policy, nutrient management and food and agri-business strategy, capturing aspects of both farming inside our own gate but also as part of the wider agri industry.

## Calving season

Planned start of calving was the 6<sup>th</sup> of February with the first arrival on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January. There were 148 cows calved in the first week of March and all is going well. We have around 60 Friesian heifers already, the majority of these are from sexed semen on our heifers, with a small amount of conventional dairy semen used on cows suitable for breeding replacements and the remainder of the cows are in calf to beef AI or Angus stock bulls in the latter stages.

## Spring grazing

We had an opening farm cover of 790 kgs DM/ha on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, which was just below target, but over winter growths rates were behind lower than planned. The cows went out by day on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February and we are also utilising on-off grazing for 3 hours after the evening milking. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February we had a farm cover of 950 kgs DM/ha. We had 30% of the farm grazed by early March, with grazing conditions in February excellent. The cows are currently being

allocated 7kg DM grass/day, 4kg DM TMR (grass silage/beet mix) and 5.5 kg of meal.

Around 50% of the farm got 2500 gal/ac of slurry in mid-January, while the remaining 50% got half a bag of Urea (23 units/ac) in early February. We are following the cows with 2500 gal/ac of slurry in any ground that didn't get it in January. The ground that got slurry in January will receive a half bag of Urea once milder conditions return.

The lightest 30 heifers have gone out to grass on the out farm, and are grazing off ground that will be closed for silage. The remainder will be let out when milder conditions return as there is no facilities to house animals on this farm if grass gets tight in early April. We plan to sell 20 maiden heifers before the breeding season.

## Future plans

I am looking forward to completing my degree in the coming months and taking some time to travel in the Southern hemisphere over the next year, as we missed out on this opportunity as part of the degree due to COVID.

As this will be my final article for the IGA, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Irish Grassland Association for the experience, and hopefully the readers enjoyed my articles.







## Multispecies sward in action - Philip & Jonathan Higgins

Alan Bohan  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



Farming near Skreen, Co. Sligo, father and son team, Philip and Jonathan Higgins run a flock of 350 ewes alongside a dairy heifer contract rearing enterprise. The Higgins farm has excellent grassland management with impressive grazing infrastructure and both Philip and Jonathan are keen advocates of grass measuring. Traditionally lambs have been finished off grass and concentrates using a 3 in 1 feeder that allows lambs eat up to approximately 500g of concentrates per day. With the increased cost of concentrates, Philip was looking into alternative finishing options and had previously finished lambs on Redstart (which worked well) but wasn't sold on the idea as the field needed to be reseeded back into grass the following spring. Jonathan is a PhD student studying the use of multispecies swards in sheep systems in UCD Lyons estate so it was a logical move for Philip and Jonathan to combine their knowledge and test out a multispecies sward on their own farm.

Seven acres was sprayed off and direct drilled in late July 2022 with the first grazing occurring in the first week of September. The field was eaten bare by dry ewes, sprayed off and then received granulated lime and 18:6:12 followed by seeding using a Guttler direct drill. One of the big issues with multispecies sward establishment is weed control as the selective herbicides used in grass reseeding would simply kill

off the herbs in a multispecies sward. To address this concern, Jonathan said that selecting a field with a low weed burden is crucial and even then you must ensure all vegetation is killed off before seeding. Philip said the direct drilling option reduced the opportunity for weeds while also removing the issue of stones compared to using the plough or power harrow options. The mix that was planted included perennial ryegrass, timothy, chicory, plantain, white clover and red clover. Jonathan stated that the grass content in the sward varies throughout the year with the herbs and clover coming into their own in the warmer, dryer periods of the year.

The early stages of the establishing sward caused some consternation at the breakfast table with Philip being less than impressed with how the field looked, remarking that it looked very weedy and not something you would be inviting the neighbours over to see. Despite Philip's reservations, Jonathan was more confident due to his previous experience of working with multispecies swards remarking that "it looks poor at the start and looks weedy to the untrained eye but that is irrelevant when the lambs are performing well on it".

The 7 acre field was sub-divided into three paddocks and a group of 120 ram lambs were introduced and rotated weekly through the paddocks. The lambs were still offered concentrates when introduced to

the multispecies sward, to keep their diet somewhat similar but the concentrate intake dropped to about 200g per day naturally as the lambs had much higher forage intakes driven by the variety in the sward. Philip noted that the lambs were extremely content on the multispecies sward, lying out with full stomachs, and he said one of the biggest issues he encountered was trying to get lambs to leave the multispecies sward when gathering them for drafting. When first introduced, the lambs preferred to graze the grass in the sward but on the second rotation they had become accustomed to the herbs and grazed them before the grass. Due to this selective grazing, Jonathan advises to keep the paddock size small so the lambs residency time per paddock is short to avoid overgrazing of the clovers and herbs, which will reduce persistency.

After two weeks the lambs were weighed and Philip was pleasantly surprised at how the ram lambs on the multispecies sward eating 200g of concentrates per day outperformed and were finished earlier than the ewe lambs on grass eating 500g of concentrates per day. Philip was also very impressed with the condition and kill out with lambs well fleshed and killing out slightly better than their grass fed counterparts, allowing Philip to drop the drafting weight from 50 kg to 48 kg while maintaining carcass weight. Jonathan noted that to see the full benefit of the multispecies sward the lambs need to be on it full time rather than as part of a rotation with grass paddocks. This is due to the fact that lamb's rumen needs time to become accustomed to the new diet so it is much better to introduce them to multispecies sward and leave them on it until slaughter.

The 7 acre field of multispecies sward finished 120 ram lambs and then afterwards 40 lighter ewe lambs by mid-November and was then held up for the winter. One negative that Jonathan did notice is that the

Multispecies sward doesn't perform as well as a grass sward over the winter because the herbs don't do well in the cold wet conditions experienced in Sligo over the winter months. So far, the multispecies sward has only fattened lambs for the Higgins' but the plan for the summer is to turn out ewe lambs rearing twin lambs onto it as they will have the highest nutritional demand in the flock and then it will be used to finish lambs again post weaning.

One of the main concerns around multispecies swards is the persistence of the herbs but this isn't a major concern for Philip because he feels that if the herbs die out over a few years you are still left with a well-established grass/white clover sward. Jonathan stated that the multispecies sward needs extra management and mind-set change and wouldn't be suitable for a whole farm but it is an excellent tool to finish lambs and to reduce the dependence on concentrates when grass quality and/or quantity drops in the autumn. The cost of establishing the multispecies sward was reduced thanks to the multispecies sward grant which reduced the cost of a bag of seed to €40 compared to €66 for a grass seed mix. Philip noted that the grant took the financial risk out of trying it for the first time and Jonathan stated that the reduced spend on concentrates practically covered the cost of the whole reseed.

The Higgins' plan to reseed another 7 acres this year with multispecies sward but this time they plan to locate it closer to the yard to allow for easier movement of lambs for drafting with a lighter batch of lambs left on the field furthest from the yard as they will require less handling. In summary, Philip is very impressed with the multispecies sward, and Jonathan looks forward to seeing how it works out over the next few years in a commercial setting.



Paddock grazing system





## Multi-species brings drought resilience to Tipperary dairy Farm

Mary McEvoy,  
IGA Council member &  
Technical Director with  
Germinal Ireland



Martin and Aine Ryan run two farms near Cashel, Co. Tipperary. In 2018 Martin and Aine took on a leased farm close to their home block and set up a second dairy unit. Across the two farms they milk 220 crossbred cows, with the herd split evenly between both farms. The leased farm is adjacent to a quarry and is very prone to drought during the summer.

Since they began running the 2nd unit in 2018, Martin, says they have suffered with some level of a drought every year during the summer months. Although the farm has excellent soil fertility, it couldn't grow the grass during the summer months. Martin started looking to multi-species swards to build drought resilience into his farm system and try to improve the supply of home-grown feed across the summer months. In 2019, he sowed his first field of multi-species and although it hasn't stopped the drought hitting, he does notice that the multi-species swards are slower to go into a drought period and quicker to recover once the rain comes.

### Improving soil health

The first multi-species sward he sowed, contained plantain, clover and perennial ryegrass. He has since experimented with different mixtures, but feels this

option is delivering a lot in terms of the nitrogen (N) fixing capabilities from the clover, good sward quality and a palatable feed for his cows. In some fields chicory has also been included in the mixture and although Martin is finding the persistency of the chicory challenging, its proportion in the sward is deteriorating significantly 2 years after sowing, he does feel that having chicory is helping in terms of drought tolerance while also having a very positive impact on the soil health "when you look at the soil with multi-species it looks healthier, is more friable, has more earthworms, it can only be a good sign for the health of the soil, with time the organic matter will also improve" and Martin hopes that this will further benefit him in terms of tolerance to drought as soils higher in organic matter generally hold more moisture and so can withstand drought better than soils low in OM.

### Persistency

Persistency of multi-species swards is a challenge and turns a lot of people off using multi-species, but Martin is convinced that they are improving his soil health when they are there. Chicory is lasting for 2 seasons, with plantain lasting for 4 years. When the herbs die out, he has excellent grass-clover swards and so far has not needed to oversow grass or clover

into these fields. Martin does believe that choosing the right grasses is important – as this is what remains after the herbs die out. He is using tetraploid grasses, predominantly AberGain, Gracehill and Astonenergy as they suit his dry farm and aren't overly competitive with the herbs but ensure a high yield and good quality grass for the cows.

### Establishing multi-species

In 2022 he under sowed an arable silage mix of peas and oats with multi-species and was very happy with his establishment. He got 15 bales of arable silage/acre and felt the multi-species sward performed very well, getting good shelter from the oats and peas initially. Prior to sowing this field, he took 2 spring grazing's, before spraying off the old sward. He sowed 7 kg peas and 13 kg/acre oats and then sowed the multi-species with a one-pass at 14 kg/acre. At sowing he applied 3 bags of 0:10:20 but held off on N until the plants greened up, he then applied 80 units of N in 2 splits. This field got no fertiliser for the remainder of the 2022 and so far this year, has received half a bag of urea. It has got no slurry, due to the slope in the field, but, if necessary, Martin will apply 1 to 2 bags of 0:7:30, depending on how the sward looks. Other multi-species swards on the farm have received slurry this spring and also 23 units/acre of urea.

### Grazing multi-species

Martin believes good grazing management is important to help the herbs, the cows clean out the swards well during the summer, almost skinning the swards. However, in the autumn Martin targets a post-grazing height of 5-6 cm as grazing too tight has a negative impact on the persistence of the herbs, they can't recover after repeated tight grazing and won't last long in the sward. At first, he found the cows were slow to adapt to grazing the herbs, but after their second grazing they selectively grazed the herbs, so it's important not to let them be overgrazed. Martin aims to get 10 grazing's from his multi-species swards, grazing them every 3 weeks during the mid-season. His best performing paddocks in 2022 were all multi-species swards, but these had also been the most reseeded swards on the farm. Autumn closing is important according to Martin, "you need to ensure you give them a chance over the winter so light gets down to the clover in particular, closing the multi-species later seems to suit them, but it is important that you don't damage them by grazing in very wet weather". Similarly, in the spring, N is important to "wake" up the sward, with the grass and herbs both having a requirement for N "in spring clover won't fix N, so it is important to apply fertiliser

N or slurry to give the swards a kick-start and ensure adequate feed for the cows."

### Controlling weeds

Weed control is an issue with multi-species swards, once sown there are no options to control weeds. Martin will control his weeds such as docks and sow his multi-species the following year. He also uses a weed-licker to control thistles on the farm. Choosing the right field to sow your multi-species is important. "Ensure you select clean fields for sowing multi-species swards, fields with a weed burden will be problematic down the road as you can't control the weeds once the multi-species sward is sown."

### Looking forward

At this point 25% of the farm is in various stages of multi-species, with multi-species being sown on the farm every year since 2019 and Martin is intending to sow multi-species again for 2023. There is no doubt that multi-species swards are working well on this farm, with cows increasing milk yield every time they graze the multi-species swards. Although Martin hasn't noticed any difference in milk percentages. Martin would encourage anyone thinking of trying multi-species to sow a field and see how they go, "start with one field, and give it a try, there is nothing to lose" he says. As to the ideal mixture "I'm still not exactly sure what it is", says Martin, "using good grass and a decent quantity of clover is necessary, probably around 2 kg/acre. The clover is doing a lot of the heavy lifting and allowing the reduction in N. Chicory and plantain are important elements also, in terms of palatability and keeping cows' content, but also improving the yield profile across the year and improving soil health".



A picture of one of the earlier sown multi-species swards, established in 2019, which now contains a nice balance of grass and clover, with a small amount of plantain still present.



# Water quality is one of the most challenging issues facing Irish farmers today

Meabh O'Hagan  
and Noel Meehan  
ASSAP Advisor  
Teagasc



## Water Quality Status

The recent EPA report published in October 2022 outlined water quality in Ireland from 2016-2021. It highlighted that 46% of Irish surface waters are of either moderate, poor or bad status. Under the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), Ireland has a target of achieving good status for all waters by 2027. This target is made all the more challenging by the fact that water quality is currently on a downward trend. Estuaries have seen the most significant decline in water quality, particularly in the south east of the country but there have also been declines observed in our coastal waters, rivers, lakes and groundwater's.

The River Basin Management Plan has been drawn up specifically to identify actions to be taken in Ireland in order to achieve the targets laid out by the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). The Nitrates Directive which outlines the rules for Good Agricultural Practice (GAP regulations) is the key national legislation in place to prevent water pollution from agricultural sources. These regulations apply to all farmers in Ireland. The introduction of new measures under the Nitrates Directive such as the recent change in the closed period for slurry spreading and the introduction of cow banding rates are an example of steps being taken in direct response to current water quality issues.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> River Basin Management Plan published in 2018 identified the need to move away from relying exclusively on regulatory inspections to achieve WFD targets and proposed to include a more voluntary and collaborative approach as an alternative method. This led to the introduction of a dedicated advisory service; ASSAP (Agricultural Sustainability, Support and Advisory Programme) which was launched as a collaboration between Teagasc, DAFM, DHLGH, dairy co-ops, with the scientific evidence provided by Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO).

## Priority Action Areas

Priority Action Areas (PAAs) were identified by the River Basin Management Plan as areas where extra resources should be focused to try to achieve accelerated

improvements in water quality. These resources include completion of a local catchment assessment by LAWPRO to understand the water quality issues in the area, the implementation of a free advisory service available to assist farmers in reducing their impact on water quality (ASSAP), stream assessments and increased inspection rates to be carried out by local authorities. This has proved beneficial as the recent EPA water quality report showed PAAs identified in the period 2018-2021 showed a greater proportion of improvements in water quality and fewer declines in water quality than waters outside of PAAs.

## Sources of pressures

Although it is clear that there are a number of sources of pressures on water quality such as urban waste water treatment, private septic tanks, industrial discharge, forestry runoff etc., it is also clear that agriculture represents the most significant pressure on water quality mainly due to the fact that agriculture makes up over 67% of land use in Ireland (Source: EPA). The main source of these agricultural pressures include nutrient and sediment runoff from farmyards and agricultural land and pesticide losses. Nutrient losses pose a significant problem as increased nutrient levels in our waters leads to increased growth of algae and plants which use up the oxygen and harms the habitat of aquatic insects and fish. The main nutrients of concern from agriculture are nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P).

## Nitrogen

Nitrogen losses most commonly occur on free-draining, light soils as they are more prone to leaching. Any excess nitrogen applied on these soils that is not utilised by the crop will be at risk of loss as it does not bind to the soil. Surplus N in a free draining soil is at risk of leaching into groundwater. This loss is most likely to occur during periods of low growth which predominantly coincide with the closed period.

## Phosphorus and sediment

Phosphorus and sediment tend to be lost through the same pathway. They are predominately lost in

heavier, poorly-draining soils that are more prone to waterlogging. When these soils become saturated, sediment and nutrient loss can occur by overland flow into surface water drains and streams. A small amount of phosphorus can cause significant algal growth and corresponding water quality issues. Sediment has two issues associated with it; first of all, fine sediment entering rivers and streams tends to clog up the river beds which acts as an important habitat for aquatic insects and secondly; sediment also can carry phosphorus which may be released in the water over time contributing to high nutrient levels.

## Risk assessment

According to the Second ASSAP Interim Report (2020) 73% of water quality issues from agriculture were identified as being as a result of diffuse loss of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment across the landscape. In order for water quality to be improved it is crucial for farmers to know how susceptible their farms are to nutrient losses. One key way farmers can do this is by reviewing Pollution Impact Potential (PIP) maps. These maps were developed by the EPA and they categorise the landscape into different levels of risk for both Nitrogen and Phosphorus loss 'using spatial data on farm management, soils and hydrogeology'. These maps can be a useful guide but must be used in conjunction with on the ground knowledge of the area in order to inform decisions at field scale.

Another key step a farmer can take in completing a risk assessment for nutrient loss on the farm is to review their own management of nutrients particularly in areas identified as high risk on PIP maps or at high risk times of year (early spring, late autumn or during poor growing conditions). This should include a review of organic manure storage and spreading management, chemical fertiliser rates and spreading practices, yard cleanliness and runoff collection. This review can be done in conjunction with your local ASSAP advisor.

## Mitigation measures

Water protection measures must be carefully tailored to each individual farm according to the level of risk posed to water quality based on PIP maps and farm management. For farms based in an area with high risk of nitrogen loss due to free draining soils, permeable bedrock, shallow subsoils etc, they should prioritise reducing excess nitrogen leaving their system. This can be done by following a nutrient management plan

to improve soil fertility, reducing chemical N usage by maximising nutrient use efficiency, reducing the protein content in meal fed when appropriate, by tailoring nitrogen application to crop growth rates and targeting organic manure and chemical fertiliser application to periods when growth is good.

For farms based in a high risk area for Phosphorus loss due to poorly draining soils prone to overland flow when soils are saturated, source control and pathway breaking measures should be prioritised. This involves managing P application especially at high risk times. It also involves identifying those overland flow pathways which carry P and sediment to waterways and developing measures to slow down or stop the flow through interception. This can be done in a number of ways including but not limited to the use of extended buffer zones, tree or hedge planting, wetlands and sediment traps.

Monitoring carried out by the Agricultural Catchments Programme (ACP) has identified when significant levels of nutrient are lost to watercourses. Not surprisingly, this occurs when soils are saturated, which aligns closely with the closed period for organic manure spreading. The ACP has shown that up to 50% of annual Nitrogen and Phosphorus losses occur during the closed period which accounts for 25% of the calendar year. This reemphasises the importance of timing manure applications to avoid saturated soils and to spread only when there is active growth. In 2022, 28kg/ha of Nitrate N left the Timoleague catchment in Co. Cork, this equates to an average of €66.64 worth of Nitrogen being lost per hectare across the catchment (based on an N value of €2.38/kg). These nutrient losses are occurring at a significant financial cost to farmers and are impacting water quality. By reducing N and P losses through targeted mitigation measures, farmers can help to protect and improve water quality while also making substantial financial savings.

## Useful links for more information

*Engage with your local ASSAP service to learn more about how you can reduce your impact on water quality. Access Pollution Impact Potential maps for your farm on <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/Water>. Learn more about the Agricultural Catchments Programme at <https://www.teagasc.ie/environment/water-quality/agricultural-catchments/>*



# The potential of red clover in the Irish grass based system

Nicky Byrne  
Teagasc, Grange Animal &  
Grassland Research and  
Innovation Centre,  
Dunsany, Co. Meath



Forage legumes, such as red clover (RC), can contribute substantially to organic, low-input and conventional animal production systems due to their ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen (N), thus reducing the reliance on chemical N fertiliser. Through RC's biological N fixation ability and through its capacity to support higher animal performance (Phelan et al., 2015) improved farm gate N-balance can be expected. Given the rising cost of fertiliser and feed, and increasing environmental constraints, incorporating RC into swards can offer significant benefits to beef production systems. Despite the many benefits of RC inclusion, it has had limited uptake on pasture-based production systems in Ireland. The poor on-farm uptake of RC is likely due to its more complex management requirements, unsuitability to frequent grazing, reduced persistence (approximately 3-4 years), and the relatively low cost of chemical N fertiliser in the previous years.

## Nitrogen fixation

Red clover swards have the ability to fix high levels of atmospheric N, making it available to plants in the soil. Swards with a high content of RC - 75% on a DM basis - are capable of fixing 24-36 kg N/tonne DM produced, meaning that such swards are potentially fixing in excess of 200 kg N/ha annually. At Teagasc Grange, RC-grass swards receiving no chemical N were found to have similar annual DM production to grass-only swards receiving up to 412 kg N/ha per year in plot studies. The application of chemical N fertiliser to RC-grass swards has antagonistic effects, reducing the proportion of RC in the sward, annual DM production and persistence. A single application of chemical N fertiliser (50 kg N/ha) in March to RC-grass swards was found to reduce the proportion of RC by 13%.

## Agronomy

Unlike for perennial ryegrass and white clover varieties, no 'Recommended List' currently exists for RC varieties in Ireland, with Irish producers relying on information from the UK Recommended/ National List to identify suitable varieties. The breeding goals for RC varieties suited to Irish farm systems are for improved dry matter (DM) production and persistence.

Red clover varieties differ in their DM production

potential and persistence under frequent cutting, with newer varieties offering improved persistence through better DM yield stability and plant survival over multiple harvest years.

Red clover should be grown in rotation with a standard grass or grass and white clover sward, allowing for a minimum four-year break to control diseases such as stem eelworm and Sclerotinia fungus (clover rot). This four-year break can be achieved by sowing RC with perennial ryegrass and white clover, with both of these species remaining productive beyond the lifespan of RC. Research at Teagasc Grange has shown that the inclusion of perennial ryegrass with RC at sowing will improve annual herbage production, silage digestibility and ensilability. Red clover should be incorporated into swards on soils that are well-drained and have a pH ranging from 6.5 to 7. Typically, sowing rates of between 7.5 to 10 kg/ha (3 to 4 kg/ac) of RC in addition to 20 to 22 kg/ha (8 to 9 kg/ac) of perennial ryegrass are recommended depending on the quality of the seedbed and season. Reseeding in spring rather than in autumn provides a better opportunity to optimise pre- and post-sowing management and overall establishment.

Unlike white clover which has a stoloniferous growth habit, RC typically has a deep taproot, an erect growth habit, with larger shoots and a lower shoot density. Stems are formed from the growing points located on the crown at the top of the taproot. Reserves of carbohydrates and N are stored in the crown and taproot, where they are remobilised to fuel regrowth after defoliation. The crown/growing point of RC is solitary and exposed, making it vulnerable to physical damage by machinery and animals. This means that RC is less suitable to frequent and intensive grazing. Consequently, it is established more often as a silage crop, with infrequent cuts (6-8 weeks), in order to minimise damage to the crown and allow the canopy to intercept sunlight to replenish carbohydrate reserves. Red clover swards generally persist for 3-4 years under a multi-cut system, although well-managed swards can persist somewhat longer.

Red clover is best suited to a three-cut silage system, with the first-cut harvested by mid-late May, which promotes higher clover proportions and DM

production for the remainder of the growing season. Figure 1 illustrates the changes in RC percentage in silage swards on a DM basis at Teagasc Grange during 2022. This sward was managed under a three-cut system receiving zero chemical fertiliser N. The RC content increased markedly after harvesting first-cut silage in May and declined after the third-cut harvest in September, due to reducing sunshine hour's length and temperatures. Increasing the defoliation frequency beyond three-cuts can reduce RC content and its contribution to DM production due to insufficient replenishment of plant reserves, and thus persistence.



**Figure 1.** Red clover % on a dry matter basis in RC-grass silage swards at Teagasc Grange during 2022.

'Late' autumn silage harvests can also be difficult to ensile, due to the reduced opportunity to wilt grass coupled with the high buffering capacity of RC-grass silage, and generally have a relatively low yield making it difficult to justify economically. To increase DM concentration to 25-35%, RC-grass silage generally requires wilting in dry conditions for 24-to-48 hours, while ensuring that the leaf is not damaged (shattered) as a result of over-wilting and excessive machinery passes, including tedding and raking. Red clover also has a lower water soluble carbohydrate (sugar) concentration further reducing its ensilability. Therefore, the inclusion of grasses which are higher in sugars than RC as a companion species will improve the overall ensilability of RC-grass silage.

## Feed value

Beef and dairy cattle offered RC-grass silage generally have a higher DM intake when compared to those offered grass silage. Red clover contains a greater ratio of indigestible fibre: digestible fibre than grass silage (0.27 vs. 0.19, respectively). While the extent of digestion is reduced for RC-grass silage when compared with grass silage, the rate of digestion of the digestible fibre is faster. This facilitates a faster rate of passage, lower rumen fill and thus increased DM

intake. Red clover has a higher concentration of crude protein (nitrogen) compared to grass. Consequently, as the proportion of RC reduces relative to grass in silage swards, there is a corresponding reduction in silage crude protein concentration. Additionally, RC-grass silages have proportionately more rumen undegraded protein than grass silage, which is of greater nutritional benefit to cattle. Through a combination of increased DMI and increased levels of rumen undegraded protein, animals consuming RC silage can achieve increased levels of performance.

## Conclusion

The inclusion of RC into grass silage swards has great potential across Irish ruminant production systems of all intensities. These swards have an enhanced ability over grass-only silage swards to maintain high levels of herbage production and animal performance from significantly lower levels of chemical N fertiliser. Red clover-grass silage swards can reduce the cost of producing winter feed but is dependent on a high level of management to ensure swards remain productive over multiple harvest years. The use of RC when combined with a range of other management and animal breeding technologies can 'future-proof' ruminant systems by reducing the level of N imported onto farms while increasing animal productivity and ultimately economic and environmental efficiency.







## Preparing for a Bord Bia audit

Damien Murray,  
Origin Green Standards  
Co-Coordinator



The Bord Bia Sustainable Beef, Lamb and Dairy Assurance Schemes (SBLAS and SDAS) sets out standards for quality and sustainability in Irish dairy, beef and sheep farming. The widespread participation of farmers in the SBLAS and SDAS is very beneficial in supporting the marketing of Irish dairy, beef, and lamb at home and abroad. For trade customers, it is not enough to claim that we have high farming standards, we must provide verifiable proof. The sustainable assurance schemes provide this proof of Ireland's high standards in animal welfare, food safety, traceability and care for the environment.

### New suckler entrants

The new Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme requires that all applicants become certified members of Bord Bia's Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme (SBLAS). This means that there will be many new entrants to the scheme over the coming months. For farmers who have never been through a Bord Bia audit, the following information will support you through the process, so you know what to expect and how to prepare.

### The audit

The purpose of the audit is to assess conformance with the Bord Bia standard, not to look for issues or to find fault with your farm. During the audit, the auditor aims to form a valid opinion based upon the evidence before them. The audit lasts 90 minutes, on average, and the length can be influenced by how well you are prepared. The audit will also help your farm meet the requirements of a cross compliance audit.

### How do I join Bord Bia?

Bord Bia operates a helpdesk for farmers, which is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. The Helpdesk is there to explain the requirements of the scheme, take applications and help you to prepare.

#### First steps:

- Call 01 524 0410 to speak to the Helpdesk.
- The Helpdesk will assist you with your application and answer any queries about the audit.
- You will receive a member pack, which contains:
  - a. A copy of the SBLAS/SDAS Standard, i.e. the requirements of the scheme.
  - b. A pre-audit information checklist.
  - c. The Bord Bia farm book, containing templates to record all required records.
  - d. Access details for the Farm Portal: *farm.bordbia.ie*.
- An auditor will contact you to choose a suitable time and date for your audit.

### The audit

1. The audit begins with a brief opening meeting, to explain the purpose of the audit and confirm your consent to be audited.
2. The auditor inspects your herd for general stock health, welfare and tagging requirements.
3. Your farm infrastructure – yard, pens, sheds etc. – are inspected to ensure they are reasonably neat, tidy and fit for purpose.
4. The auditor will access if there is pollution or

environmental risks and any safety hazards.

5. The auditor will ask to see your farm documents and records. For new applicants, all records required under the scheme must have been correctly maintained for a period of at least six months prior to the audit. (See checklist.)
6. The audit ends with a closing meeting in which the auditor will inform you of the audit findings, explain any issues that need to be corrected (if necessary), and explain the recommendations they will be making (if any).
7. Before final certification, an inspection report goes to the inspection body.  
On successful completion, you receive your certification letter via post and your Farmer Feedback Report with your carbon footprint.

### The close-out model

On completion of an audit, any issues identified as non-conformances will be explained to you by the auditor. You will then have a period of up to 28 days to provide evidence of corrective action to close out the audit. This approach, means you will not fail on the day of audit if issues arise. Instead, will have a period of up to 28 days to address non-conformances. For example, if the auditor observed an unfenced lagoon, they would request that you provide a photo of that same lagoon made safe within 28 days.

Evidence can be provided by post, text message or via email. You can also upload evidence by logging onto *farm.bordbia.ie*. You can also nominate an individual, such as a relative or neighbour, to complete the close-out on your behalf.

The close out process does not apply if no issues are raised during the audit. In these cases, the audit report will go immediately to the certification body.

### Common issues

In general, the majority of non-compliances found during the audit relate to record keeping and in particular, recording of animal remedies (usage and purchase). Ensuring you have a full and complete record of all medicine purchases and medicine usages prior to the audit will eliminate any non-compliances.

For animal remedy usage, you must record the following:

- Date of administration.
- Name of medicine.
- Quantity given.
- Identification of animal.
- Name of person giving the medicine/remedy or the name of the prescribing vet.
- Date of the end of the withdrawal period. A common mistake is to insert the number of withdrawal days instead of date of end of withdrawal period.

Where an individual animal is treated, the identity of the animal must be clearly documented, for example using the tag number or freeze brand. Where the remedy is

administered to a group of animals, it must be possible to clearly identify each animal in the group from the relevant herd register (e.g. all calves born Jan 1 - Mar 31 only).

Animal remedy purchase records can be kept using computer-based records, by using a manual such as the Bord Bia Farm Book, or by retaining vet's prescriptions for the previous six months.

The following details must be included:

- Date of purchase.
- Medicine name.
- Quantity purchased.
- Name and address of the supplier.
- Documents and records required
- Herd register (either online on Ag food or in the blue book).
- Animal remedy purchase and usage records.
- Animal movement records.
- Passports / Blue cards.
- Knackery receipts (if applicable).
- Animal health plan.
- A record of any animal mortality and significant health issues.
- Feed purchase records and feed delivery dockets.
- Pesticide usage (if used on the farm).
- Farm Safety Risk Assessment.
- Waste plastic collection receipts (if any).
- Sustainability Survey.
- Farmyard sketch of bait points (if bait points used).
- Name of veterinary services providers, veterinary product suppliers, hauliers and any persons applying pesticides.

### Carbon footprint

As part of the audit process, you are required to complete a sustainability survey in which you report on farm management activity. The sustainability survey is used to calculate each farm's carbon footprint and grass-fed calculation.

The survey must be completed before the audit, you may complete this online through *farm.bordbia.ie* (Note you will need the PIN received in your member pack). Alternatively, you can contact the Bord Bia Helpdesk and they will assist you. All data provided must be from the previous calendar year, for example if your audit takes place in April 2023, you report from the previous January to December 2022.

### Farmer Feedback Report

The information provided in the Sustainability Survey is reported back to you after your audit through a Farmer Feedback Report. This report allows you to evaluate the performance of your farm with regard to sustainability criteria such as the farm's carbon footprint. It also identifies how you can improve the efficiency and emissions of your farm. You will receive your report in the post after certification or it can be downloaded from the Bord Bia farm portal (*farm.bordbia.ie*).



# Soil fertility

## – an investment or expense?

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA Council Member  
and Yara



### Introduction

Soil fertility is a key constraint on many grassland farms reaching their grass production targets, and from a national perspective soil fertility improvement is a key action in both our climate action plan and our nitrates action programme to improve water quality. Now is a good opportunity to focus on soil fertility as farmers switch from straight nitrogen (N) fertilisers to NPK's during April and May.

### Soil pH and liming

Maintaining our grassland mineral soils at or above a pH of 6.3 is a key component of soil fertility, and could be considered the foundation on which to build good phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) soil fertility. The tangible benefits of correcting your soil pH out, are increased grass production from improved nutrient use efficiency.

Soil pH affects most notably the chemical and biological properties of soil, with Figure 1 demonstrating the relative availability of a host of necessary plant nutrients at different soil pH's. Narrowing of the line depicts a decrease in availability while a broadening

indicates an increase in availability. Soil pH has the greatest influence on soil P availability. Optimising soil pH maximises the release of nutrients from plant residues and manures through a process called mineralisation. For N this can amount up to 120 kg/ha annually. Earthworm activity, is a good indicator of soil health is also improved by correcting low soil pH.

There is a strong positive return on investment from lime of between €4 to €7 worth for every €1 invested in lime (Teagasc, Lime Factsheet, 2021). Lime we know corrects soil acidity, but it does much more than that. The calcium in lime can also improve soil structure and provide a source of calcium for crops as the lime reacts with acids in the soil over time. Don't be tempted to apply liming products to correct soil pH unless a recent soil test states there is a lime requirement.

There is no bad time to apply lime, the only exception being on silage fields, where it is advised to leave three months between lime applications and harvesting silage, as lime residues on grass could inhibit the silage fermentation process. Urea or slurry should be applied 7 – 10 days before liming and not the other way around to prevent very high ammonia-N losses.

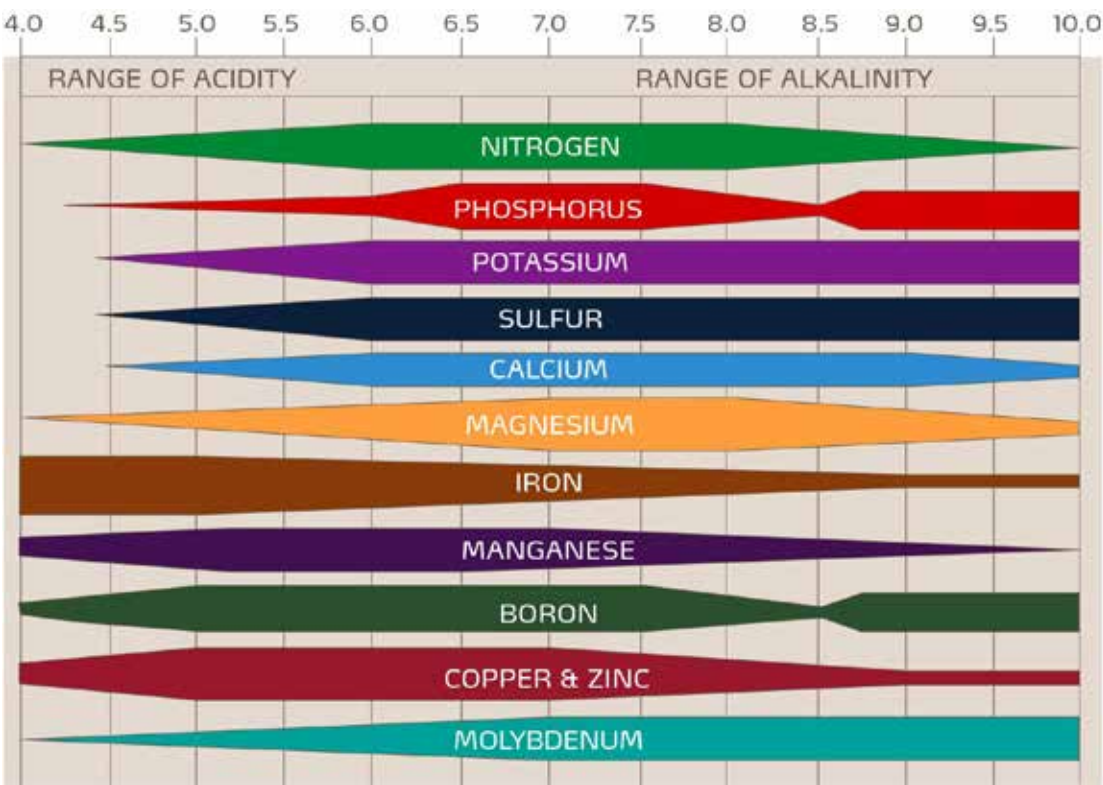


Figure 1. The relationship between nutrient availability and soil pH

Correcting low soil pH on reseeded can be the difference between success and failure, so soil sampling beforehand (generally before cultivation to prevent turnover of nutrients) and applying lime is worthwhile. If lime can be applied months in advance of a reseed, then this is preferable to allow lime to work.

Nationally, Teagasc estimate that lime sales would need to be close to 2 million tonnes annually to meet our annual liming requirements, and in recent years the trend is going in the right direction, albite there is still some way to go. The latest national lime use figures published by the Central Statistics Office, show that lime sales in 2021 had increased to 1.3 million tonnes. This is up 50% on 2020 which in turn had shown an increase of 16% on 2019.

### Soil P & K fertility

Soil P & K fertility has been improving in recent years which is in line with increased fertiliser P & K sales over the same timeframe, however last year's decrease in P & K sales of circa 25% are worrying and would not have helped progress.

Both P & K are necessary at certain levels in the soil to sustain plant growth in line with optimum N fertilisation. Phosphorus plays a major role in the energy supply for many plant metabolic processes and enzyme activity. This energy is needed for the active uptake and internal redistribution of other nutrients, so even though P demand is small compared to N, its availability is essential. A rule of thumb for P offtakes from liveweight gain and milk, is 1 kg for every 100 kg increase of liveweight gain or 1,000 litres of milk sold off the farm.

Potassium regulates the movement and storage of solutes throughout the plant, affecting nutrient uptake, photosynthesis, N fixation in clover, and stomata regulation which is key at times of drought stress. During rapid grass growth, the large uptake of N as nitrate ions is normally balanced by a similar uptake of K ions which maintains the electrical neutrality of the plant.

Unfortunately, there are no free lunches when it comes to replenishing soil P & K. So, what is removed through grazing or silage crops must be replaced otherwise soil P & K levels will decrease on paddocks where offtakes exceed inputs.

The most effective means to maintain sufficient levels of P & K in soils to optimise grass (and other forage crops) is to soil test regularly, at least every 4 years but for those in a nitrates derogation every 2 years,

and considering the price of fertiliser, the investment in soil testing is invaluable. Soil test reports assign an index number of 1 – 4 for both P & K (See Table 1), with 1 indicating a very low soil status for that nutrient and 4 meaning there is plenty. Index 3 is the optimum index, which means there is adequate soil P or K to maintain crop performance, but it is necessary to apply maintenance levels annually of P & K to replace offtakes to maintain this index.

Table 1. Soil Index system

Soil Index	Index description	Response to fertilisers
1	Very low	Definite
2	Low	Likely
3	Medium/Adequate	Unlikely
4	Sufficient/High	None

Source: Teagasc, Green Book

Knowing your soil P & K fertility is the starting point to putting a nutrient management plan (NMP) in place for every paddock on your farm. Some may need investment to improve P & K fertility, and this will take a number of years applying build-up rates to hit index 3, while those in index 4 paddocks don't require any P or K to maintain optimum herbage production. A NMP allows you to optimise the organic nutrients you have at your disposal so that you only purchase the P & K fertilisers that are needed. Commonly, paddocks which are dry and/or close to the farm yard have often very high soil fertility, because of the over application of slurry over the years as it was convenient. Having a NMP in place can help farmers better distribute slurry and other manures to those areas of the farm that will benefit most.

When deciding on where to target manures like slurry, remember that two thirds of the nutrient replacement value of slurry lies in its P & K content, so it makes sense to direct it to parts of the farm that need P & K rather than using it for its N replacement value. The priority area for slurry should be silage ground, grazing paddocks that may have been taken out for silage and areas of the farm with low soil P & K indexes.

### Conclusion

Don't underestimate the importance of soil fertility to your farm business. Put a NMP and liming plan in place, and see soil fertility as an investment. Finally, record everything you do. This allows you to assess nutrient inputs, soil fertility and paddock performance to inform future nutrient inputs.





Brian and Norma Rohan,  
Embrace FARM founders

## Embrace FARM – Support after the unexpected

Catherine Kenneally  
Embrace FARM Business  
Development Manager

### Our journey

'It's a club no one ever thought they would be part of' – is one description given to the only charities of its kind in Ireland supporting farm families affected by sudden death or injury on the farm. Embrace FARM began its journey in 2014 at the first remembrance service arranged by Brian & Norma Rohan, the charities founders. Brian lost his father Liam, a well known farmer and ploughing man, in a farm accident on the family farm near Shanahoe, Co. Laois in 2012. The Rohan's felt there was a need for families such as theirs and the countless others who had died fatally in farm accidents to be remembered so they arranged a service to commemorate them all. Now in its tenth year, the ecumenical service reads hundreds of names of people who have died from various types of sudden deaths at its event on the last Sunday of June in Abbeyleix.

### What is the impact?

Embrace FARM is positioned to support farm families after a sudden death or injury has occurred on the family farm. Whilst there are countless initiatives annually to promote farm safety in Ireland, agriculture remains the most dangerous industry to work in

Ireland. The impact of a fatal farm accident has far reaching consequences for a farm family. The loss of a family member e.g., parent or partner, the family must grieve for but also the loss of income and knowledge of the family farm goes to the grave with the deceased. The grieving process affects everyone differently no matter what the process, yet what makes a fatal farm death more significant is the person may have died on the exact place they worked in as well as lived in their entire life. This leads to a set of complex issues for the those left behind to deal with such as access to finances where the family farm was solely in the name of the deceased, the ongoing operation of the farm i.e., caring for livestock etc and decisions of what to do now and for the future.

### How we can help

The charity has two streams to help farm families after a sudden death or injury on the farm. It hosts a number of peer-to-peer supports for farm families that have come into contact with the organisation through support groups, residential therapy weekends and information events. These supports have been solely funded through donations given by the farm community to Embrace FARM over the years, without whose support the charity wouldn't function today.

In addition, Embrace FARM has created the Encircle Programme offering farm families tailored one to one professional supports in the aftermath of a sudden death or injury. Emotional support through one-to-one counselling to help the mental and emotional wellbeing of families on their journey of grief and practical support such as legal, agri-business and financial guidance to help a farm family make decisions in their new reality. The Encircle Programme, is one of eight projects funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine through their European Innovation Project (EIP-AGRI) programme for farm safety, health and wellbeing.

Embrace FARM may have begun through the grief and loss of the Rohan Family's farm accident, it now supports all types of sudden death and injuries that are farm related. This includes farm accidents, suspected suicide, and sudden illness or injury. The encompassing of all types of sudden fatalities on farms has opened the door to many families now contacting the charity for help as soon as two weeks after their loved one has past away. The vision for the organisation is to continue the work of the past ten years i.e., helping farm families after a sudden tragedy has occurred. Embrace FARM is a registered charity and complies with the code of governance as outlined by the Charities Regulator and other regulatory bodies.

### How to get in touch

Whether you have been directly affected such as lost a family member or if you have lost a good friend or a neighbour in a sudden death or injury, we encourage all too please get in touch. Embrace FARM is continually building its information about grief and loss on its website and is happy to post out information and a remembrance candle to anyone that wants to be commemorated at the annual service or receive more specific support.



Embrace FARM's drive to remember campaign 2018 to raise awareness of the lives lost in farm accidents by families donating the wellies of the loved ones they have lost to the charity to highlight the message. A tractor was driven across the 32 counties in conjunction with Macra Na Feirme covering nearly 5000kms and over 150 drivers.



Liam Rohan, son of Brian & Norma Rohan, lighting candles to at the 2020 Remembrance Service.

Further contact information [www.embracefarm.com](http://www.embracefarm.com)

Email [info@embracefarm.com](mailto:info@embracefarm.com) Phone 057-8510555 or 085-7709966



# PADRAIG WALSH

## A big man and a big loss to Irish agriculture

Matt O'Keeffe  
Past IGA Council  
member and Irish  
Farmers Monthly



Much was written in the days and weeks following Padraig Walshe's untimely death of the huge impact he had on Irish farming. His sudden death at the age of 65 was met with shock by the Irish agricultural community with thousands of mourners, representing all strands of farming and agribusiness, in attendance at his funeral. Recognised as an outstanding grassland farmer, Padraig was also an impressive representative of Irish farming interests. He was president of Macra na Feirme from 1987 to 1989. Before taking on the role of IFA president from 2006 to 2010 and he was awarded the Creamery Milk Supplier of the Year accolade for his outstanding grassland management practices. After his time as IFA leader he was elected president of the European farmer representative body, COPA. The Durrow, county Laois-based milk producer was a Nuffield Scholar and his thesis on the future of Irish dairy is widely referenced. The Irish Grassland Association recognised Padraig Walshe's talents by



appointing him as its president in 1996. Fully committed to the cooperative movement Padraig served for many years on the council and area committees of Tirlán. Latterly, Padraig was chairman of Farmer Business Developments and oversaw the very successful expansion of the holding company into hotel and leisure facilities and investment property in Ireland and abroad.

### *A lifelong improver*

The Laois-based milk producer proved time and again his commitment to advancing the cause of Irish agriculture. His acute intellect facilitated reasoned and rational responses to the challenges of his time.

A key attribute was Padraig's ability to take the long view on improving the lives, businesses and lifestyles of his fellow farmers. To that end he was fully committed in his Macra years to promoting the rejuvenation of the Irish Co-op Movement through training and encouraging younger participation. He promoted farm succession throughout his career as a farmer representative, based on his own positive experience of early succession from his father Paddy. The practicalities have changed over the years, but the themes of Padraig's foresight remained the same. He played a key role in securing tax concessions to encourage long-term land leasing, which has been one of the most positive changes in land use over the past half century. It is also a lasting legacy that he successfully advocated for a third level dairy course aimed at young people aspiring to manage dairy farms.

### *Foresight*

If we need further evidence of his foresight, it can be found in his Nuffield scholarship thesis. Completed in 1996, the Scholarship allowed Padraig to compare and contrast international dairy farming with Irish milk production. Twelve years into restricted milk production under the EEC's Milk Quota System, Padraig

foresaw the eventual demise of quotas, even if his timelines turned out to be somewhat optimistic. As IFA Dairy Committee Chairman in the early years of this century he influenced then Agriculture Commissioner Marianne Fischer Boel to contemplate eventual quota abolition. The following extract from Padraig Walshe's Nuffield thesis displays his thinking: "Ireland has a suitable climate which can grow grass for most of the year. We have the best dairy research facilities and people in the world to help us utilise this valuable resource. We also have a well-educated, highly motivated young farm workforce. The fact that Irish farmers have control of our processing facilities is a valuable advantage, not to be thrown away lightly. We also can produce milk to the highest international standards. We have access to the most valuable market in the world for dairy products, but we need better access to the growing markets in other parts of the world."

### *Preparing to take on the world*

"There is also a need to continue our research to maximise our competitive advantage. Teagasc must face up to its challenges in technology transfer and reform its training priorities. If we do not tackle our infrastructure problems, we will end up with 8,000 - 10,000 dairy farmers, with an average of 100 cows each. If we tackle these problems now we can have 12,000 - 15,000 dairy farmers with an average herd size of at least 100 cows, thus doubling total production. If we use the period between now and when quotas go to prepare ourselves for a more competitive environment, we will not need subsidies to take on the world."

"It is clear that, sooner or later, quotas will be abolished, and Irish dairy farmers will have to contend with world milk prices. I feel it is vital that we would use the transition period to prepare ourselves for a more competitive production environment."

The following Nuffield thesis extract was written in 1996. "If present trends continue only 16,000 of our farmers will be milk producers (by 2006) with an average of about 50 cows each. Efficient, small dairy farmers must be given an opportunity to increase their scale. It is my view that, in a world price environment, specialist milk producers will need at least 60-80 cows to earn the same margin as they do now with 30 cows within the present milk quota regime."

### *A belief in education*

His Nuffield thesis shows Padraig Walshe's total commitment to a scientific approach to food production was matched by his equally consistent commitment to education: "When I set out, I wanted to examine the potential for expansion of the dairy industry around the world. I identified several key factors needed for expansion. The most important one of these is a young, well educated, highly motivated workforce. Farming is competing with the economy generally for young entrants. If margins continue to increase, the only hindrance to expansion will be processing capacity."

The Nuffield Thesis tackled larger economic issues: "Something that is often forgotten, when comparing production costs between Ireland and our non E.U. competitors, is that we are expected to produce cheap food in a high-cost economy where labour, energy and many other vital inputs, are much more expensive. Labour is the major cost, because all our support services, processing and marketing businesses, must pay this high labour cost."

### *Following the science*

Padraig Walshe was as active at his death as at any time during his most productive life. Until his death on February 1st this year he diligently and enthusiastically pursued his ambition to further develop the Walshe dairy farm at Bishopswood near Durrow. Without doubt, his son, Pat, with the able support of Padraig's widow Ella, will continue on that journey. Outside the farmgate, as chairman of Grass10 programme he was still 'following the science' through lifting Irish grassland farmers ambitions to deliver ten grazings per paddock and ten tonnes of grass dry matter utilised annually, from thirteen tonnes of grass grown per hectare. These are goals that have been well surpassed on the Walshe farm over many years.

Padraig was an individual who could 'walk the walk' as well as 'talk the talk'. His early death is a terrible loss to the entire Irish agricultural community and to his friends, but none more so than to his family, wife Ella, daughters Julianne, Catherine and Elma, son Pat. The Irish Grassland Association would like to extend our deepest sympathies to the Walshe Family.





## Nominations to the council of the Irish Grassland Association 2023/2024

Maura Callery  
IGA Office Manager



The Irish Grassland Association CLG (IGA) AGM will take place in September. A small number of seats on our council can become available to be filled through election at our AGM annually, on foot of the expiration of existing council members terms. Our organisation would not be able to function without the expertise of our extraordinary voluntary council members. When these individuals vacate their seat upon retirement, this then gives us opportunities to welcome new personalities to the team. Last year we welcomed eight new faces to the IGA and to our newly formed CLG council. Ciaran Mulligan Dairy Farmer, Karina Pierce Professor UCD, Ken Graham Beef Farmer and Engineer, Philip Cosgrave Grassland Agronomist Yara, Eamon Sheehan Dairy Farmer, David Lawrence Beef/Sheep Farmer and Ruminant Support Specialist Brett Brothers Ltd, Terry Carroll B&T Advisor Teagasc and Declan Marren Beef/Sheep Farmer and Irish Farmers Journal were part of our new dynamic team.

We want to give you our long-standing members, lots of notice to consider if you wish to put your name forward this year for election to our council. All IGA members are eligible to be nominated for election to the IGA council. If you think that this voluntary role appeals to you, then please contact us to express your interest by emailing [office@irishgrassland.ie](mailto:office@irishgrassland.ie) (no later than our administration deadline of 9am 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023) with two supporting nominations. (Constitutionally we also need to receive two supporting nominations for you in writing from two current Irish Grassland Association members). Feel free to ring our office if you require some guidance in this process. We would love to hear from you.

**While our AGM is a good time away, it is paramount to register your interest if you wish to attend, by emailing the office [office@irishgrassland.ie](mailto:office@irishgrassland.ie) no later than 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023 as the summer is an extremely busy time in our organisation and we want to ensure we have all our AGM business in order in good time.**



# Irish Grassland Association CLG

As you are aware, the Irish Grassland Association is now a Company Limited by Guarantee. We will continue to offer the very same services to you our loyal members, but as a new legal entity i.e. a CLG, and not a registered charity. Our membership DD fee will remain at €60 in 2023. Value to our members is crucial to us and this fee has not increased in over ten years.

Soon we will not be able to contact you, or keep you informed of any activities in the Irish Grassland Association, without your clear and express consent to join the Irish Grassland Association CLG. So please resubmit your signed membership application to us, if you have not done so already.





**Irish Grassland Association**

# **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Sheep Event**

**Offaly**

**18th May 2023**

**FREE  
EVENT**

**Beef Event**

**Westmeath**

**13th June 2023**

**FREE  
EVENT**

**Two Day Dairy Extravaganza**

**Meath & Cavan**

**17th & 18th July 2023**

**Student Event**

**Limerick**

**October 2023**

**Members Event**

**Cork**

**9th January 2024**

**Dairy Conference**

**Cork**

**10th January 2024**

