

# Irish Grassland Association

Members' Information Booklet

Issue No. 54. 2024



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



**Want to have your company logo on this page?**  
**Contact the Irish Grassland Association CLG office today...**

Any views, images, graphics or opinions presented in this or any Irish Grassland Association CLG (IGA) publication are solely those of the author. Care has been taken by the authors to ensure accuracy of content and the information is intended as a general guide. The IGA and its editor does not accept responsibility for any unforeseen errors, copyrights or omissions howsoever arising. Photographs will be taken at all events and occasionally published.



Kells, Co. Meath, Ireland. Tel: (087) 96 26 483  
General Information: [office@irishgrassland.ie](mailto:office@irishgrassland.ie) [www.irishgrassland.ie](http://www.irishgrassland.ie)

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



# Contents

## SECTION 1:

Editorial	5
The 2024 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association	6
Corporate Members Spotlight	12

## SECTION 2: EVENTS

Exciting New Free Autumn Event for IGA Members	16
Dairy Social Night Preview 2025	20
Dairy Conference Preview 2025	22
Top-quality E-grade weanlings on show in Co. Mayo	26
Key practices driving a successful Donegal enterprise	28
Dairy Summer Tour showcases Laois farms	31

## SECTION 3: FARMER FOCUS

A difficult farming year but a rewarding one as IGA President	34
Navigating the challenges of 2024 on the Pringle family farm	36

## SECTION 4: TECHNICAL FOCUS

Fodder Budgeting for the winter period 2024	38
Key learnings from 2024 grazing season	40

## SECTION 5: HEALTH & WELL BEING

Weathering the Winter: Practical tips for minding your wellbeing this winter	42
--	----

### 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!

Follow us on



Irish Grassland Association IGA



@IrishGrassland



@irishgrassland

## Editorial



Philip Cosgrave  
Editor and IGA Council Member

### Welcome to the IGA Autumn 2024 Members' Information Booklet.

Hello and welcome to our Autumn edition of the members' information booklet, which is jam packed with the latest event news for what has been an another extremely busy year for the IGA. The sheep, beef and dairy summer tour sub-committees can draw breath now after executing three excellent summer events. Later in the booklet learn more about a new IGA event which is being launched in conjunction with FBD Insurance for members on the 30th of October, called "Proud to be an Irish farmer and food producer".

First up in the booklet is the important business of the AGM which took place in September, and at this point we would like to make members aware that annual memberships will be deducted in the coming weeks. IGA office manager and director, Maura Callery updates us on changes to the council, including those who have joined council for the first time and those retiring off council who have all contributed hugely to the continued success of the IGA during their terms of office. We also congratulate John Farrell on taking up his position as president and welcome Vincent Griffith as new vice-president. The association would like to thank outgoing president Bryan Hynes for his time, dedication and stewardship of the IGA during his term as president.

Corporate members are extremely important to the IGA, and in a new departure for the members' booklet we feature four corporate sponsor businesses and learn how they benefit from their relationship with the IGA.

Our new event in the Horse and Jockey will be upon us soon and the purpose of this event is to bring to the fore

important issues for farming and agriculture. Christy Watson previews this inaugural event which will focus on the importance, economically and socially that farming plays in Ireland and the topic of succession that for many families can be a difficult subject to broach. We preview the dairy conference and the social night in January which has an excellent line up of farmers and researchers covering three sessions covering the future direction of dairying, the fundamentals of profitability – grass land management and cows, and finally managing the spring workload.

Our three summer events were very well attended, and expertly organised by the three responsible committees. What makes these events great is the quality of the host farmers, and this year was no different. Darren Carty's review of the sheep event up in Donegal back in May gives an insight into the meticulous operation that Margaret and Jack Stevenson run which impressed the 300 plus people who attended that evening. The beef event in June which Niall Claffey reviews brought us to Ballinrobe where we witnessed the suckler-to-weanling operation of Martin and Caroline Shaughnessy producing high value export quality weanlings through excellent grassland management, genetics and stockmanship. Liz Duffy reviews a very successful albeit wet dairy summer tour in July, where they visited two excellent dairy farms in Laois utilising different cow types. It seems that it's not the type of cow that matters so much but how well you operate a grazing based system.

In our farmer focus section we hear from Bryan Hynes on his year as president and learn how Bryan and his wife Deirdre embarked on their careers in dairying. Conor Holohan catches up with outgoing council member and Wicklow farmer John Pringle about his time on council and how he has managed a difficult farming year. John also shares some worthwhile advice with Conor for those starting out in their farming careers.

Our technical focus has some very timely advice from David Lawrence as he outlines the principles of fodder budgeting. We also review grass quality in 2024 with Claire Beckett & Rhonda Currie, which I'm sure readers will agree posed difficulties for liveweight gain and milk production. Finally, Conor Holohan has some practical tips for minding your wellbeing this winter which like your physical health benefits from taking a proactive approach.

Philip Cosgrave,  
Editor IGA publication.





# The 2024 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association

Maura Callery  
IGA Office Manager and  
Director of the IGA



The 2024 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association CLG (IGA) took place on 4th September in the Mullingar Park Hotel. A presentation of the year's activities was presented to all by the outgoing President Bryan Hynes. He thanked all outgoing council members on their retirement from the council. He said our council members include some of the most progressive Irish agri-business personnel, agricultural scientists, consultants and highly efficient beef, sheep, and dairy farm producers. We are so fortunate that there is a wonderful array of skillsets on the council and this diversity contributes so well to the varied content in our activities. Bryan Hynes then welcomed the incoming President for 2024/5 John Farrell.

The following council members retired from the IGA at the AGM:



Ciaran Lynch  
IGA Past President 2018/19  
and Teagasc



Aidan Murray  
IGA Past Council Member  
and Teagasc



Fiona McGovern  
IGA Past Council Member  
and Teagasc



Alan Bohan  
IGA Past Council Member  
and Teagasc



Patrick Gowing  
IGA Past Council Member  
Dairy Farmer and Teagasc



Declan Marren  
IGA Past Council Member  
and Aurivo Co Op



John Pringle  
IGA Past Council Member  
Beef and Sheep Farmer



New members of the IGA Council are L-R Lisa McGrane, John O Loughlin, John Farrell IGA President, John McCabe and Nicki Byrne

John Farrell took over as the newly elected President. He then made a presentation to Bryan Hynes and commended him on his term as President. Vincent Griffith, dairy farmer was announced as the new Vice President of the IGA.

John Farrell then welcomed his chosen co-opted members to strengthen his council during his presidential term. Lisa McGrane Teagasc and John Connell, beef and sheep farmer. They will all serve one year on the team.

As there were no surplus seats at this year's AGM, Conor Holohan and Tom Coll were deemed elected to council following a one-year co-opted term on the IGA council and will now serve their first full term on the council of three years. John O'Loughlin Grassland Agro, Nicki Byrne Teagasc, Mike Bermingham dairy farmer and John McCabe Teagasc were also deemed elected onto the IGA council and will all serve a three-year term on council.

The plans for the upcoming twelve months were discussed at the meeting. The following council members were appointed as chairpersons and vice chairpersons for the year ahead.

Editorial committee:	Chairperson: Philip Cosgrave	Vice Chairperson: Conor Holohan
Sheep committee:	Chairperson: Tom Coll	Vice Chairperson: Lisa McGrane
Beef committee:	Chairperson: Paddy Casey	Vice Chairperson: Ken Graham
Dairy Conference:	Chairperson: Liz Duffy	Vice Chairperson: John O'Loughlin
Dairy Summer Tour:	Chairperson: John McCabe	Vice Chairperson: Eamonn Sheehan
Sundry committee:	Chairperson: David Lawrence	Vice Chairperson: Ciaran Mulligan

On behalf of the new IGA President John Farrell and the IGA Council, we would like to thank you, our loyal farming and corporate members for your overwhelming interest and continued support. We would also like to thank everyone else involved in running our organisation, the speakers at our conferences, those who make generous contributions to our publications, our host families, and our long-standing sponsors.

We look forward to meeting you all very soon again in 2025.



## New Council Members 2024/2025



**Tom Coll:** Tom served one year as a co-opted IGA council member and is now elected to the team for three years. He is a Teagasc Drystock adviser based in Mohill, Co. Leitrim. He has worked with Dairy, Beef and Sheep discussion groups both in south Leitrim and Sligo since 1995. He also facilitates a contract heifer rearing discussion group and has clients who contract rear male progeny from the dairy herd for both ICBF and the Teagasc EveryCalf project. He is a Teagasc representative on the Calf Stakeholder Forum. He has a keen interest in grassland management especially on difficult soil types and in animal health across all enterprises. Tom also runs a prolific mid-season lambing ewe flock with his wife Carmel in south Leitrim.



**Conor Holohan:** Conor served one year as a co-opted IGA council member and is now elected to the team for three years. He recently became programme director for the 'Make the Moove' rural mental health and support service, originally established by Macra. Previously Conor worked as a senior grassland scientist at the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute in Northern Ireland and also spent time working at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on a US-Ireland Fulbright scholarship. He grew up on a suckler beef farm in Scotstown, Co. Monaghan and completed a degree in agriculture at Dundalk Institute of Technology in 2015. Afterwards he undertook a masters in Agricultural Innovation and Support at UCD/Teagasc before completing a PhD in dairy and grassland science at UCD.



**John O'Loughlin:** John was elected to the IGA council for three years. He is the head of sustainability at Grassland Agro. John joined Grassland Agro in 2017 and has performed various roles within the company. He has developed the Grassland Agro Soil Sustainability Programme. In this role, he focuses on the three pillars of soil health to improve economic, environmental and social sustainability of Irish farms, and is involved with the Teagasc Grass10 Team. John Grew up on a dairy farm in Kilmaley, Co. Clare. He completed a BSc in science at the University of Limerick and holds a PhD in Agronomy from UCD. John also holds a BA in management practise from the University of Limerick.



**Nicky Byrne:** Nicky was elected to the IGA council for three years. He is a livestock systems research officer at Teagasc in Grange Dunsany, Co Meath. Nicky's work focuses on grass-based dairy calf-to-beef production systems. Prior to this appointment at Grange, Nicky completed a PhD in grassland science at Teagasc Moorepark, Co Cork and also at Queens University Belfast. Nicky's PhD focused on perennial ryegrass evaluation and the identification of grazing traits. Nicky's research programme at Teagasc Grange and Johnstown Castle is focused on developing dairy-beef systems of reduced slaughter age, utilising animal genetics, nutrition and pasture type. The overall objective of this research programme is to develop more sustainable dairy and beef farm systems through economic efficiency and lessened environmental impact. Nicky also runs a suckler and store lamb operation on his home farm in Co. Galway.



**Mike Bermingham:** Mike was elected to the IGA council for three years. He and his wife Tina and family are farming five miles outside Fermoy in Co. Cork. Mike's career has taken him from a busy carpentry business, to contract rearer, to the Dairy farm he runs today. A new entrant to Dairy in 2014, Mike & Tina have developed the farm and infrastructure for the 96 cows they are milking in 2024. The farm consists of 47 Ha, 500-600 ft above sea level of reasonably dry land. Mike was the 2019 Dairy Grassland Farmer of the year and high grass utilisation is central to the farm system. In recent years Mike has been involved with the Teagasc Clover 150 programme that is targeting high clover inclusion across the milking platform with the aim of reducing fertiliser N. Mike also has a keen focus on business efficiency balanced with family life and activities.

## New Council Members 2024/2025



**John McCabe:** John was elected to the IGA council for three years. He comes from Ballyhaise, Co. Cavan, qualifying from UCD with a BAgSc (Animal & Crop Production) in 2015. In 2016/17 he broadened his experience of pasture-based dairying in the UK and New Zealand. John worked at Ballyhaise College teaching green cert courses before spending 4 years as a facilitator on the Teagasc-Dairygold joint programme, co-facilitating 24 discussion groups in North Munster. John lives in Galway with his wife Emer who is a mixed practice vet. He now helps deliver the Teagasc – Aurivo Farm Profitability Programme covering Connaught, Donegal and Westmeath. He's a keen interest in driving higher profitability through improvements in growth and utilisation of pasture, silage quality and genetics of dairy cows. Alongside promoting strong technical and financial performance, he focuses his efforts on helping farming families achieve a reduction in workload and a greater work/life balance in the interest of succession and the long-term survival of the industry.



**Lisa McGrane:** Lisa was invited onto the council by John Farrell IGA President for a one year co-opted term. She completed a BAgSc in animal science from University College Dublin (UCD) and graduated in 2019. From there she went on to complete a PhD in Teagasc Athenry in conjunction with UCD, which was entitled 'An evaluation of companion forages in combination with perennial ryegrass to increase animal performance and output in pasture-based sheep production systems'. This research investigated the suitability of including clover and herb species with perennial ryegrass swards for use in pasture-based sheep systems and investigated the effects of various grassland management parameters on these swards. Lisa's current role as education officer in Teagasc Ballymote, Co. Sligo involves the delivery of level 5 and level 6 agricultural courses to students in the region. Lisa is actively involved in her home suckler to beef farm in south Donegal, which in recent years has diversified with the addition of a small mid-season lambing ewe flock.



**John O'Connell:** John was invited onto the council by John Farrell IGA President for a one-year co-opted term. He is Farming just outside Ballinamore in county Leitrim. His farm consists of 34 hectares of typical Leitrim land in two equal blocks 3 miles apart. He keeps 170 lowland ewes with predominantly Suffolk and Belclare breeding with a few other breeds thrown in to keep it "interesting". Ewes are housed at Christmas and lambing commences on the 10th of March after which ewes and lambs are turned out to grass. I also run a dairy heifer contract rearing enterprise which consists of 50 calves and 50 1-2 yr olds. Calves arrive at three months of age and are returned to the source farm just prior to calving 20 months later. John has been involved in quite a few projects over the last 15 years with Teagasc, hosting in service training days, workshop groups and open days/discussion groups. John was in the sheep BETTER farm program for 9 years which was an invaluable experience and benefitted him greatly as a farmer. During his time in the program, he won the grassland farmer of the year award in 2019. He has been a benchmark farmer and facilitates level 5 and 6 students on an ongoing basis. He is also involved in the signpost program for the last few years.



**John Tobin:** John was invited onto the council by John Farrell IGA President for a one-year co-opted term. John is from a dairy and beef farm in South Tipperary. He completed an honours degree in Food & Agribusiness Management from UCD (2012), followed by an MSc in Agricultural Economics at Purdue University in the US (2014). John currently works as a Data and Intelligence Specialist with Bord Bia's Strategic Insight division. In this role John's responsibilities include reporting on exports of Irish Food, Drink and Horticulture, and generating Bord Bia's annual Performance and Prospects report and the purchasing of market insights. Having previously held roles with Case New Holland in their Precision Agriculture department, the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board as a market analyst covering red meat, dairy and farm economics and more recently in Tirlan's (formerly Glanbia Ireland) milk office business partnering function. John is actively involved in the family farm in partnership with his father Jim and brother Tom.



# Meet the Team of the newly formed IGA CLG Council 2024/2025



**John Farrell**  
IGA President, Beef and  
Sheep Farmer and AIB



John Farrell, newly elected President making a  
presentation to IGA Past President Bryan Hynes



Alan Kelly  
IGA Past President  
and UCD



Bryan Hynes  
IGA Past President  
and Dairy Farmer



Christy Watson  
IGA past president  
and Council Member



Vincent Griffith  
IGA Vice President  
and Dairy Farmer



Ciaran Mulligan  
IGA Council Member  
and Dairy Farmer



Conor Holohan  
IGA Council Member  
and Make the Moove



David Lawrence  
IGA Council Member  
and Brett Brothers



Eamon Sheehan  
IGA Council Member  
and Dairy Farmer



Ed Payne  
IGA Council Member  
and Dairy Farmer



John O Loughlin  
IGA Council Member  
and Grassland Agro



John McCabe  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



John O'Connell  
IGA Council Member  
and Sheep/Contract Farmer



John Tobin  
IGA Council Member  
and Bord Bia



Ken Graham  
IGA Council Member  
and Beef Farmer and Engineer



Lisa McGrane  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



Liz Duffy  
IGA Council member  
and Teagasc



Maura Callery  
IGA Director  
and Office Manager



Michael Egan  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



Mike Bermingham  
IGA Council Member  
and Dairy Farmer



Niall Claffey  
IGA Council Member  
and Elanco Animal Health



Nicky Byrne  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



Paddy Casey  
IGA Council Member  
Beef and Sheep Farmer



Philip Cosgrave  
IGA Council Member  
and Yara



Tom Coll  
IGA Council Member  
and Teagasc



# CORPORATE MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT



Standing L-R: Niall Walsh, Paul Hyland, GD Young, Caroline Young, Liam Delaney, John Farrell, Mick Conlon, Gerry Smyth, David Hannon. Seated L-R: Regina Walsh, PJ Nangle, Nicola Fetherstone

AIB is one of Ireland's leading financial institutions, committed to supporting the agricultural sector. We offer a comprehensive range of products and services tailored to meet the needs of farming customers. With decades of experience in the sector, we have developed an in-depth understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities facing Irish farmers.

We have Ireland's largest team of dedicated specialist Agri Advisors who work closely with our customers, providing strong, objective farm financial and technical analysis. We understand that each farm is different, whether you're involved in dairy, beef, sheep, tillage or any other agricultural enterprise. That's why we offer tailored financial products such as farm loans, machinery and equipment finance and working capital solutions to help you achieve your goals.

Agriculture is a significant part of our business and will continue to be in the future. We are committed to being a trusted partner for Irish farmers, helping you navigate the challenges of market fluctuations, sustainability and evolving industry standards.

For more information on how AIB can support your farm business, visit your local branch or explore our range of Agri-products and services at [aib.ie/farming](http://aib.ie/farming).

Lending criteria, terms and conditions apply. Credit facilities are subject to repayment capacity and financial

status and are not available to persons under 18 years of age. Security may be required.

## IGA Corporate Membership

AIB is proud to be a long-standing corporate member of the Irish Grassland Association, aligning with its mission to advance sustainable farming practices. We recognise the importance of efficient grassland management in driving profitability and sustainability within Irish farming. For Irish agriculture to continue to prosper the fundamentals of our grass-based system will be key.

AIB is delighted to sponsor the Irish Grassland Association Dairy Summer Tour. We have sponsored the Dairy Summer Tour since 2012 and during this time have visited many excellent farms who have shared their insights and stories with all those in attendance. Events like the Dairy Summer Tour are extremely important as farmers get to witness and learn first-hand from the experiences of their colleagues and hear how grassland management has impacted positively on the output and the financial performance of their farm.

Our Agri team attend other IGA events during the year including the Dairy Conference, Sheep Event, and Beef Event as there is always something to learn!

# CORPORATE MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT



L-R: Bryan Hynes, IGA and Pat Collins, Precision Pastures

Precision Pastures was founded by 2020 Beef Grassland Farmer of the Year Pat Collins, and is a specialist consultancy service focused on grass measuring and grassland management. Based in Cork, Tipperary and Waterford, the company is dedicated to helping farmers make informed decisions to optimise their grassland management. With a team of three staff, whom have extensive experience managing large-scale grass-based dairy farms in Ireland and New Zealand, Precision Pastures offers personalized advice tailored to each client's needs.

The consultancy's primary goal is to reduce farmers' workload, improve profitability, and enhance understanding of the value of good grassland management. Pat and his team work collaboratively, discussing various options to determine the best solutions for each farm. This team approach ensures that farmers receive well-rounded advice, making Precision Pastures a valuable resource for technical support.

Pat is also committed to promoting the broader adoption of grassland management practices, sharing his expertise through one-on-one consultancy and regular online content. His popular YouTube channel, 'Dower House Farm', offers daily insights into life on his home farm, furthering his mission to educate and

inspire farmers. Looking toward the future, Precision Pastures has plans to expand its services and is always seeking motivated individuals with strong grassland management skills to join the team.

## IGA Corporate Membership

Precision Pastures became corporate members of the IGA to tap into the vast knowledge and experience its members offer. The IGA also provides us a valuable platform to connect with farmers who could benefit from our services and help drive business growth.

The IGA's long-standing heritage and shared goal of advancing grassland management aligns perfectly with Precision Pastures' mission to help farmers make better decisions and improve profitability. By participating in IGA events and staying informed through the society's newsletter, our team remains up to date with the latest innovations and trends in grassland farming, ensuring we can deliver cutting-edge advice to clients.

Beyond professional development, IGA membership also provides a vital social outlet, offering opportunities to network and build relationships with others in the industry. These connections not only support business growth but also foster a sense of community within Ireland's farming sector.



# CORPORATE MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT

Standing L-R: Garry McHugo, Diarmuid Brannock, Philip O'Connor – all Farm Pro Team and Michael Dunphy, Dairy farmer(Previous Farm Pro Advisor)  
Seated L-R: Billy Holland, Partner Portlaoise Office, Valerie Broadhurst, Head of HR, Orlaith Brennan, Financial Controller and Emma Dooley, Farm Pro Advisor.



Ifac is a leading team of accountants and financial advisers with deep expertise in the farming, food, and agribusiness sectors. For over 45 years, we have been at the heart of life across Ireland, providing tailored financial solutions to help our clients thrive. With 30 locations nationwide, our services are easily accessible, ensuring that our clients receive top-quality advice and support no matter where they are.

Our specialist teams offer a comprehensive range of services, from day-to-day accountancy and tax planning to securing funding and making wise investments. We understand the unique challenges faced by businesses in the agricultural sector, and we are dedicated to providing advice and solutions that are specifically designed to meet your needs.

We know there are a hundred and one things that demand your attention every day, and we don't think that accounts, taxes and payroll should be among them. By partnering with ifac, you can delegate these critical tasks to us, allowing you to focus on what you do best. Our goal is to make your life easier by handling the complexities of financial management, so you can dedicate your time and energy to growing your business. The benefits extend beyond your business, as our support also helps you achieve a better work-life balance.

Whether you need ongoing support for your day-to-day or are looking to start your succession planning

journey, our team is here to help. Visit us at [www.ifac.ie](http://www.ifac.ie) to learn more about our services and how we can help you succeed. With ifac by your side, you can rest assured that you are in expert hands, giving you the peace of mind to focus on what matters most.

## IGA Corporate Membership

Since 2009, ifac has proudly collaborated with the Irish Grassland Association (IGA), forming a long-term corporate relationship that continues to grow stronger. Our partnership with the IGA has allowed us to support and engage with Ireland's leading agricultural professionals, particularly at key events such as the Dairy Conference, Sheep Conference, Beef Conference, and IGA farm walks. Ifac's participation in these events showcases our commitment to the advancement of the agricultural sector.

Noreen Lacey's, Head of Banking at ifac, tenure on the IGA Council further deepened our involvement with the association, ensuring that ifac's expertise and insight contribute directly to discussions shaping Ireland's agricultural future. By attending and supporting these events, we have helped foster industry innovation and shared knowledge that strengthens both individual farmers and the entire Irish agricultural community. Our collaboration with the IGA represents a shared vision for sustainability, growth, and continuous improvement in Irish agriculture.

# CORPORATE MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT

Standing L-R: Kevin Fitzgerald Regional Sales Representative Dairymaster, Shane Kennedy Regional Sales Representative Dairymaster, Paul Kelly PFK Dairy Systems Ltd, Noel Scanlon Regional Sales Representative Dairymaster, John Dempsey Dempsey Dairy Services, Willie Allen Allen Dairy Services, John Daly Research & Innovation Manager. Seated L-R: John Harty CEO Dairymaster, Róisín O' Regan Marketing Executive Dairymaster, Pat Ryan National Sales & Dealer Development Manager Dairymaster,



Dairymaster is a world leader in dairy equipment manufacturing. It operates from its head office in Causeway, Co. Kerry, Ireland with operations in the UK, Europe and USA. Dairymaster has a wide innovative product range of milking parlour systems, equipment and management software for milk cooling, feeding, and slurry handling, as well as health and fertility monitoring all backed up by modern farm management software.

Dairymaster aims to make dairy farming more profitable, enjoyable and sustainable. The firm has a long history of collaboration with research partners, developing, validating and commercialising advancements in dairy farm technologies. The company has carved out a reputation, both nationally and internationally, for providing hi-tech solutions for dairy farming and is recognised as one of the world's most innovative companies in agriculture.

Dairymaster does the opposite to more expected business practices. It researches, develops and manufactures in one location. This integrated manufacturing model has allowed capability to be built, strengthened team building and has helped engender a culture where information and ideas are shared. Dairymaster's location, customer focus and

constant monitoring of product performance in the marketplace, has given the company an up-to-the minute understanding of all aspects of the industry as it evolves.

The biggest motivator within the company is seeing the effect they are having with their customers and the communities in which they work. Dairymaster have customers in more than 40 countries, including the US, Germany, UK, Japan, New Zealand and China.

## IGA Corporate Membership

Working with the IGA allows Dairymaster to connect with progressive farmers and industry leaders who prioritize efficient grassland management, a key component of dairy farming success. This partnership enhances innovation, supports knowledge sharing, and promotes cutting-edge technologies that improve farm productivity while protecting the environment. By aligning with the IGA, Dairymaster strengthens its mission to empower farmers with the best tools and practices, ensuring a sustainable future for the Irish dairy industry. The IGA events provide valuable opportunities for our staff to network with industry players and gain a deeper understanding of what is happening on the ground.





# EXCITING NEW FREE AUTUMN EVENT

Christy Watson  
IGA council member  
and past president



## Proud to be an Irish farmer and food producer

The IGA is launching a new event in conjunction with FBD Insurance for all farmers this Autumn, titled "Proud to be an Irish farmer and food producer."

This event will take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October in the Horse and Jockey Hotel, Horse and Jockey, Co. Tipperary, E41 AP86. The event will commence at 7.30 pm with light refreshments available, and all farmers are welcome to attend this event. There is no pre-registration required to attend.

The overall aim for this new event is to showcase the positive contribution Irish farmers and food producers make to the Irish economy, rural communities, and the environment. Commenting on this new event Patricia O Halloran FBD said, "FBD Insurance is proud to sponsor this event. As a longstanding partner to the farming industry, FBD is committed to supporting and acknowledging the good work that is being done by farmers to meet sustainability targets and we look forward to hearing more about this at the IGA's Proud to be an Irish farmer and food producer event."

Farmers perceive that they are being blamed for many of the environmental issues Ireland faces, without any clear recognition of the vital role they play in food production and their role in protecting and enhancing the many habitats on their farms.

Notwithstanding the task ahead for farmers to meet the requirement for improvement in water quality and climate change targets. It is important to highlight the many positive things that are happening on Irish farms.

The event will provide farmer attendees with some clear facts on Irish agriculture so that they can discuss with those outside the farming sector the positive benefits and good work being carried out on farms right across the country.

Facing into the winter period we would hope that the event will leave attendees with a sense of pride in being a farmer, producing quality food.

Succession and inheritance is an issue that eventually must be dealt with by all farm families. One of the biggest decisions any farmer will make will be the transfer of the family farm to the next generation. Many issues arise when planning the transfer of the farm, with numerous questions to be answered. For instance, who is to receive the farm, when will it be transferred, when should the planning process start, how much will it cost both the transferor and the transferee, and what provisions will need to be made for the lifetime security of the transferor/s. These are only a few of the issues to arise when contemplating the transfer of the family farm. Many other issues will need to be dealt with to achieve a successful outcome for both the transferor/s and transferee/s.

### Session 1

Succession and Inheritance – Solicitor Ms. Aisling Meehan, will cover this important topic with a 20-minute presentation. Following her presentation, Aisling will have an open discussion with former IGA president and dairy farmer Paul Hyland, to tease out what makes some agreements work both within families and outside a farmer's immediate family. As with all arrangements there can be challenges in setting up and following through on agreements, and this session, as well as showcasing how to set up agreements, Aisling will look at the common pitfalls that farmers and business can fall into when developing a partnership agreement or a successful succession plan. There will be ample opportunity during this session for attendees to ask questions on farm succession and inheritance.

Take advantage of Aisling's insights as we enter the winter period which often gives farmers the head space that's needed to tackle the important topic of farm succession and more importantly initiate a plan and discussion with potential transferees.

### Session 2

Professor Thia Hennessy, of UCC will present for 20 minutes outlining the key metrics that demonstrate the critical role of Irish agriculture in food production, environmental enhancement and rural life. Professor Hennessy's presentation will be followed by a discussion with Jack Kennedy editor of the Irish Farmers Journal to analyse further the information which Thia will cover. Again, there will be plenty of time for questions from attendees during this discussion.

In addition to this session, the IGA will prepare a factsheet which will be available to all attendees to take home with them, listing important facts on the positive contribution Irish agriculture makes to the Irish economy, environment, and rural life.

We hope that this factsheet will help especially in the lead up to and over the Christmas period when farm families will be meeting non farming families and friends, providing an opportunity to have a balanced and informed debate on

the very positive contribution Irish agriculture makes to Irish life and providing nutritious food to over 40 million people worldwide.

### Free Event

Please come along to this free event to have your questions answered on the topic of farm succession and arm yourself with the facts on Irish agriculture that will allow you to have an informed debate with people not familiar with farming and agriculture on the unique positive contribution made by Irish family farms.

Again, to emphasise all farmers and farm families are welcome to this free event kindly sponsored by FBD insurance. Without the assistance of FBD it would not be possible for the IGA to host this event. There are plenty of reasons why you should be proud to be an Irish farm food producer so come along and enjoy the celebration of Irish agriculture and learn all about the critical issues when considering transferring the family farm to the next generation.

## SPEAKER PROFILES

### MS. AISLING MEEHAN



Ms. Aisling Meehan is an Agricultural Solicitor with significant experience working with dairy farming families. Aisling is originally from a successful farming family in Co. Clare, as well as running her own legal business. Aisling is married to Brian, and have four young children, Philip, Maureen, Holly and Fiachra. Aisling and Brian also run their own family farm in Clare.

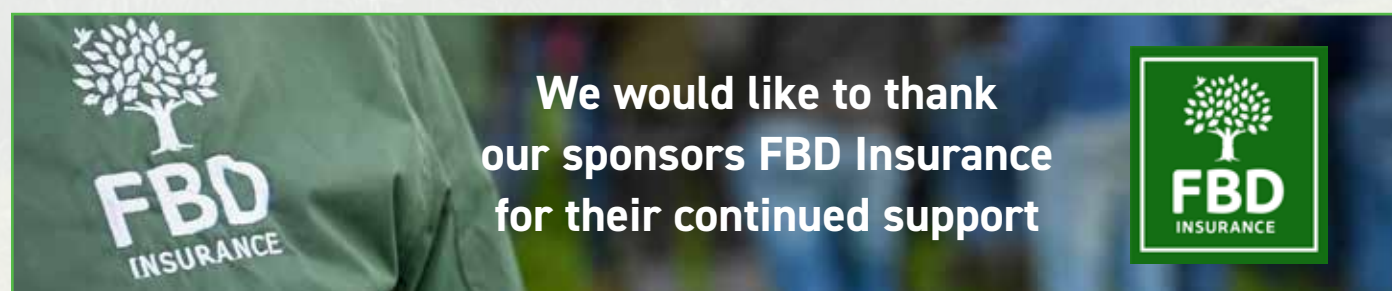
Aisling Meehan graduated from University of Limerick with an honour's degree in Law and Accounting. She trained in the Tax Department of one of Ireland's top five law firms, William Fry graduating as a Solicitor and Chartered Tax Adviser (AITI). She has also completed FETAC 180-hour certificate in Farming and was awarded a level 5 FETAC certificate in Animal and Crop Production as well as a level 6 FETAC certificate in Farm Business.

### PROFESSOR THIA HENNESSY



Professor Thia Hennessy is Head of the College of Business and Law at UCC and prior to this she was Dean of Cork University Business School. A highly cited agricultural economist, Prof Hennessy has published numerous articles on the economic performance of the agri-food sector and is a regularly invited expert to policy-making bodies such as the European Parliament and the OECD.

Prior to joining UCC, she was employed by Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority, where she was responsible for the National Farm Survey (NFS) which produces the official statistics on farm income in Ireland. In this role, she led a multidisciplinary team to adapt the survey to develop a unique suite of sustainability indicators. Thia is a regular contributor to TV, radio and the printed press clearly disseminating complex information supported by statistical evidence.



## FREE EVENT, EVERYONE WELCOME

## FREE EVENT, EVERYONE WELCOME





*The O'Moore discussion group enjoying the IFAC / IGA social night at the Midlands Park hotel.*

## IGA Dairy Summer Tour Social night with IFAC

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA council member  
and Yara



On foot of the astounding success of the Social BBQ night held in Kells Co Meath last Summer the night before the Dairy Summer, we decided to replicate this event this year. IFAC kindly hosted the social night with the Irish Grassland Association.

Groups of farmer and corporate members of the Irish Grassland Association gathered at the Midlands Park Hotel in Laois. Lots of our members have been telling us that they are enjoying the combination of social and learning opportunities that we are now facilitating with social events prior to larger events and gatherings. We hope to run lots more events like this in the future and if you have any suggestions on what we should do, please let us know.

The Irish Grassland Association are very grateful to IFAC for wanting to become involved. Commenting on the event Philip O'Connor said, "IFAC are very passionate about getting involved with these social networking opportunities and events for farmers. There was a great attendance from all over the country."

**We would like to thank *ifac* for their  
kind sponsorship of this event**



*Standing L-R: Garry McHugo,  
Diarmuid Brannock, Philip O'Connor  
- all Farm Pro Team and  
Michael Dunphy, Dairy farmer  
(Previous Farm Pro Advisor).  
Seated L-R: Billy Holland,  
Partner Portlaoise Office,  
Valerie Broadhurst,  
Head of HR, Orlaith Brennan,  
Financial Controller  
and Emma Dooley,  
Farm Pro Advisor.*





## IGA Dairy Social Night – Dinner and conversation with Michael Ward and Christopher Cahill

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA council member  
and Yara

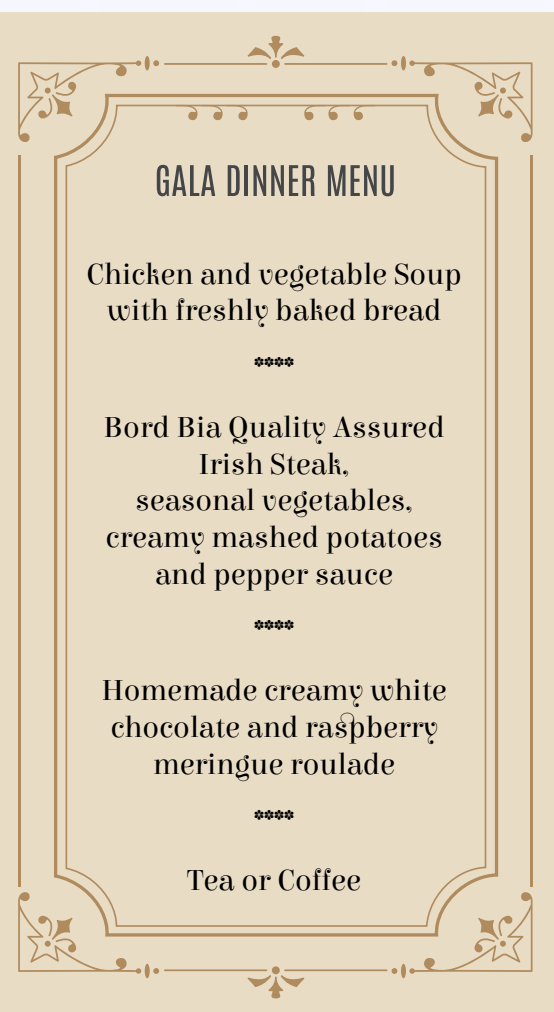


The IGA Dairy Social Night takes place on the eve of the Dairy Conference at the 4-star Charleville Park Hotel, in Cork on Tuesday the 7th of January. This expanded social night is back bigger than ever in January. The positive feedback and the increasing number of requests from members and corporate members to include a social element to the dairy conference, is no surprise considering the popularity and success of previous social nights. The evening will kick-off at 7:30 pm with a 4-course Gala dinner, and afterwards Paul Hyland, dairy farmer and past IGA council member will host a panel discussion with our two special guests for the night, builder and dairy farmer Michael Ward and FBD young farmer of the year Christopher Cahill. This will be a very interesting discussion with two individuals who have had very interesting and different pathways into dairying.



**B&B €60pp double / €110pp single  
Dinner €55pp. Table of 10 only €500**

Group name / Corporate logo  
can be displayed on table  
Professional photos can be taken of groups  
Book with the hotel direct **063 33700**



## Special Guests



**Michael Ward**

**Michael Ward** is a civil engineer by profession and now farmer. He owns one third of the 'Ward and Burke Group' that will construct €500m worth of municipal infrastructure in Canada, USA, England and Ireland in 2024. They employ over 1,600 skilled people, hiring and training mainly young graduates and apprentices from farming backgrounds. He owns Kilbegnet House Farm in Creggs County Roscommon where he operates a 500 cow dairy herd with his share farming partner, Andrew Clarke. He grew up on a mixed dairy, beef and sheep farm which he inherited with his brother aged 16. After completing his leaving cert he farmed for two years before going onto study at UCG. After graduating he rented his farm and emigrated to England to work as a contractor. For the past 35 years he has lived between England and Ireland and in the past 4 years has resumed farming.



**Christopher Cahill**

**Christopher Cahill** hails from Co. Cavan where he picked up his Grá for dairying while helping on his uncle's 45 cow dairy farm. He completed the UCD dairy business degree, and subsequently a master's degree in sustainable agriculture. He spent 2013 working in New Zealand where he encountered the concepts of share farming and contract grass measuring services. Following this Christopher worked with Lakeland Agri for 6 years as an animal nutritionist, and gained a huge wealth of experience in this role. In 2021, with help from Macra's Land Mobility Service, Christopher formed a farming partnership with Tony McCormack, a dairy farmer from Co. Westmeath where Christopher provides the cows and labour, while Tony provides the land and infrastructure. Christopher is also the director of Cavan Grassland Consultancy Ltd, a company he established to provide grassland measurement and management services.

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







## IGA Dairy Conference 2025 preview – Prioritising Profitability

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA council member  
and Yara



### Introduction

The annual IGA Dairy Conference sponsored by Yara takes place on Wednesday, the 8<sup>th</sup> of January next in the Charleville Park Hotel. We have an exciting line up of speakers for this year's conference, addressing key issues affecting dairy farmers. The title for this year's conference is 'Prioritising Profitability', with the various sessions addressing farm profitability and more efficient work practices. Eva Ross from Yara said "We are proud to be a long-standing supporter of the Dairy Conference as productivity and sustainability continues to be a fine balancing act during a time of squeezed margins and environmental challenges."

### Session 1: Foundation for profitable dairy farming

In this first session Laurence Shalloo from Teagasc will set the scene for the dairy industry outlining the challenges that exist in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving water quality, enhancing biodiversity on farms while at the same time improving the living standards of practicing farmers. Cork dairy farmer Joe Deane will join Laurence for a panel discussion with Chair Jack Kennedy where he will discuss the current and future challenges for his business.

Laurence Shalloo qualified from UCD with a BAgSc in 1999, and he went on to complete his PhD in 2004 on the development and use of the Moorepark Dairy Systems Model to analyse institutional and technical changes

in dairy farming. He joined Teagasc in 2004 and was appointed the Head of Animal and Grassland Programme in 2022. He is Deputy Director of the SFI/DAFM-funded VistaMilk Research Centre and is an Adjunct Professor at UCC. Laurence has set ambitious targets for the next 5 years, to increasing the sustainability of Irish livestock production systems. Challenges exist in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving water quality, enhancing biodiversity on farms while at the same time improving the living standards of practicing farmers. These challenges will be best addressed through optimising Ireland's advantage in grass-based systems of animal production.

Joe Deane is originally from a 50 acre drystock farm in Trabolgan, East Cork. Joe and his wife Laoise live in Carrigaline, Cork, with their two kids Jack 5, and Michael 3. They are farming two leased dairy farms in the Carrigaline area and one in the Carrigtwohill area. Unit 1 has been leased since 2017 and the lease is up at end of this year, so he is actively looking for a replacement for that presently. Unit 2 in Carrigaline is in year 5 of an 11-year lease. Unit 3 in Carrigtwohill is in year 2 of a 10-year lease. They milked 470 cows in total across the 3 farms in 2024. Labour is one full time staff member on each unit plus relief. The farm manager on the Carrigtwohill farm has stock leased into the business. All machinery work is contracted out. R1's are contract reared mainly and R2's

are reared on his home farm. There is a strong emphasis on clover swards across all units.

### Session 2: More grass better cows

Teagasc dairy advisor John McCabe will begin this session presenting a paper detailing the key attributes that underpin a profitable dairy farm, examining the impact that lower grass growth had on dairy farms in 2024 and what can be learned from this experience. Margaret Kelleher of ICBF will then present a paper on the value of improving the genetic potential of dairy herds and importantly how it can be achieved.

John McCabe is from Co. Cavan. He qualified from UCD with a BAgSc in 2015. In 2016/17 he broadened his experience of pasture-based dairying by working in the UK and New Zealand. He started his career in Teagasc in 2017 before spending 4 years as a facilitator on the Teagasc-Dairygold joint programme, where he co-facilitated 24 discussion groups in North Munster. Together with his colleagues, he now delivers the Teagasc – Aurivo Farm Profitability Programme covering the province of Connaught, Co. Donegal and Co. Westmeath. He has a keen interest in driving higher profitability through improvements in the growth and utilisation of pasture, silage quality and dairy cow genetics. Alongside promoting strong technical and financial performance, he focuses much of his efforts on helping farmers achieve a reduction in workload and a better work/life balance.

Margaret Kelleher: Margaret works as the Genetics Operations Manager at the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF), leading a team of geneticists to deliver national and international genetic evaluations for the dairy and beef industry. She has been working with the ICBF as a quantitative geneticist for 10 years, running genetic evaluations, developing innovative decision support tools, and conducting in-depth analyses to investigate genetic potential in areas such as female fertility, sexed semen, linear type, and dairy-beef merit. In 2015, Margaret completed her PhD at Teagasc Moorepark, where her research resulted in the creation of the C.O.W. (Cow's Own Worth) Index, a widely-used culling tool for dairy cows. Margaret, who comes from a dairy farming background in Cork, and her husband Brendan, are farming in Cashel, Co. Tipperary, milking 200 high EBI cows under a long-term lease.

### Session 3: Switched on for spring

The final session will focus on helping farmers manage the spring workload more effectively. Conor Hogan a labour management specialist with Teagasc will present his research on this topic and afterwards dairy farmers Maeve O'Keeffe and Jack Kearney will talk through how each of them manage and organise their farms during this busy period.

Conor Hogan is from a farming background, and he currently manages the Teagasc People in Dairy Programme. He graduated in 2018 with a Dairy Business degree from UCD, before completing a PhD in dairy farm labour management and productivity in collaboration between Teagasc Moorepark and UCD. In his current role, Conor's research focuses on farm workplaces, in terms of how they can be made more attractive and sustainable for both current and prospective farmers and farm operatives. Conor will discuss how increasing our understanding of the springtime workload, can result in reduced work hours, and can have associated positive effects on many aspects of dairy farming; including the health and safety of farm operators, reduced stress and fatigue among farmers creating more attractive workplaces, and improving farm profitability.

Jack Kearney is farming in Rathcormac in Cork in partnership with his parents Larry & Annette. They are farming 78 Ha of which 44 Ha is owned. Jack came straight home after agricultural college in 2015. He was Young Dairy Farmer of the Year 2023. After nearly a decade of hard work and strong planning, the Kearney farm is now a great example for the whole industry for how an intensive family-owned dairy farm can be both financially and environmentally sustainable while providing a good quality of life for both generations. The Kearney's milked 160 cows in 2024 and with additional land coming on stream they are planning to milk 230 in 2025. Jack will discuss how they effectively plan and manage the spring workload and what adaptations they see necessary for Spring 2025.

Maeve O'Keeffe is a sixth-generation dairy farmer from Ballynoe in East Cork. Maeve is married to Ed, and they have two daughters. Maeve completed a Nuffield scholarship in 2016, investigating lameness in dairy cows. Ed and Maeve manage a 320-cow spring calving herd across two separate milking platforms. Maeve is also the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Hoof Care Direct. Hoof Care Direct is a family run business based in East Cork that sells hoof care products and they manufacture and sell the Inspect4 Rollover crates on farm. During a panel discussion Maeve will outline how they organise and manage people during this busy spring period and the preparation necessary to ensure that the farm runs as smoothly as possible to reduce stress and fatigue, and ensure the health and safety of farm operators.

### Conclusion

This should be an informative and insightful day for attendees with ample time for attendees to engage with the speakers. To avoid disappointment, secure your tickets early for this event by booking your tickets online at [www.irishgrassland.ie](http://www.irishgrassland.ie).



## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**Laurence Shalloo:** Laurence qualified from UCD with a BAgSc in 1999, and he went on to complete his PhD in 2004 on the development and use of the Moorepark Dairy Systems Model to analyse institutional and technical changes in dairy farming. He joined Teagasc in 2004 and was appointed the Head of Animal and Grassland Programme in 2022. He is Deputy Director of the SFI/DAFM-funded VistaMilk Research Centre and is an Adjunct Professor at UCC. Laurence has set ambitious targets for the next 5 years, to increasing the sustainability of Irish livestock production systems. Challenges exist in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving water quality, enhancing biodiversity on farms while at the same time improving the living standards of practicing farmers. These challenges will be best addressed through optimising Ireland's advantage in grass-based systems of animal production.



**Maeve O'Keeffe:** Maeve is a sixth-generation dairy farmer from Ballynoe in East Cork. Maeve is married to Ed, and they have two daughters. Maeve completed a Nuffield scholarship in 2016, investigating lameness in dairy cows. Ed and Maeve manage a 320-cow spring calving herd across two separate milking platforms. Maeve is also the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Hoof Care Direct. Hoof Care Direct is a family run business based in East Cork that sells hoof care products and they manufacture and sell the Inspect4 Rollover crates on farm. During a panel discussion Maeve will outline how they organise and manage people during this busy spring period and the preparation necessary to ensure that the farm runs as smoothly as possible to reduce stress and fatigue, and ensure the health and safety of farm operators.



## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**John McCabe:** John is from Co. Cavan. He qualified from UCD with a BAgSc in 2015. In 2016/17 he broadened his experience of pasture-based dairying by working in the UK and New Zealand. He started his career in Teagasc in 2017 before spending 4 years as a facilitator on the Teagasc-Dairygold joint programme, where he co-facilitated 24 discussion groups in North Munster. Together with his colleagues, he now delivers the Teagasc – Aurivo Farm Profitability Programme covering the province of Connaught, Co. Donegal and Co. Westmeath. He has a keen interest in driving higher profitability through improvements in the growth and utilisation of pasture, silage quality and dairy cow genetics. Alongside promoting strong technical and financial performance, he focuses much of his efforts on helping farmers achieve a reduction in workload and a better work/life balance.



**Margaret Kelleher:** Margaret works as the Genetics Operations Manager at the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF), leading a team of geneticists to deliver national and international genetic evaluations for the dairy and beef industry. She has been working with the ICBF as a quantitative geneticist for 10 years, running genetic evaluations, developing innovative decision support tools, and conducting in-depth analyses to investigate genetic potential in areas such as female fertility, sexed semen, linear type, and dairy-beef merit. In 2015, Margaret completed her PhD at Teagasc Moorepark, where her research resulted in the creation of the C.O.W. (Cow's Own Worth) Index, a widely-used culling tool for dairy cows. Margaret, who comes from a dairy farming background in Cork, and her husband Brendan, are farming in Cashel, Co. Tipperary, milking 200 high EBI cows under a long-term lease.



## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**Conor Hogan:** Conor is from a farming background, and he currently manages the Teagasc People in Dairy Programme. He graduated in 2018 with a Dairy Business degree from UCD, before completing a PhD in dairy farm labour management and productivity in collaboration between Teagasc Moorepark and UCD. In his current role, Conor's research focuses on farm workplaces, in terms of how they can be made more attractive and sustainable for both current and prospective farmers and farm operatives. Conor will discuss how increasing our understanding of the springtime workload, can result in reduced work hours, and can have associated positive effects on many aspects of dairy farming; including the health and safety of farm operators, reduced stress and fatigue among farmers creating more attractive workplaces, and improving farm profitability.



**Jack Kearney:** Jack is farming in partnership with his parents Larry & Annette in Cork. Jack came straight home after agricultural college in 2015. He was Young Dairy Farmer of the Year 2023. After nearly a decade of hard work and strong planning, the Kearney farm is now a great example for the whole industry for how an intensive family-owned dairy farm can be both financially and environmentally sustainable while providing a good quality of life for both generations. The Kearney's milked 160 cows in 2024 and with additional land coming on stream they are planning to milk 230 in 2025. Jack will discuss how they effectively plan and manage the spring workload and what adaptations they see necessary for Spring 2025.



## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**Joe Deane:** Joe is originally from a 50 acre drystock farm in Trabolgan, East Cork. Joe and his wife Laoise live in Carrigaline, Cork, with their two kids Jack 5, and Michael 3. They are farming two leased dairy farms in the Carrigaline area and one in the Carrigtwohill area. Unit 1 has been leased since 2017 and the lease is up at end of this year, so he is actively looking for a replacement for that presently. Unit 2 in Carrigaline is in year 5 of an 11-year lease. Unit 3 in Carrigtwohill is in year 2 of a 10-year lease. They milked 470 cows in total across the 3 farms in 2024. Labour is one full time staff member on each unit plus relief. The farm manager on the Carrigtwohill farm has stock leased into the business. All machinery work is contracted out. R1's are contract reared mainly and R2's are reared on his home farm. There is a strong emphasis on clover swards across all units.



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



**B&B €60pp double / €110pp single**  
**Dinner €55pp. Table of 10 only €500**

Group name / Corporate logo  
can be displayed on table  
Professional photos can be taken of groups  
Book with the hotel direct **063 33700**





## Top-quality E-grade weanlings on show in Co. Mayo at June 2024 Beef Event

Niall Claffey  
IGA council member and  
Elanco Animal Health



This year's IGA Beef Event took place on the farm of Martin and Caroline Shaughnessy, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. Martin runs a suckler-to-weaning system, while also lambing approximately 150 ewes – a typical suckler and sheep operation in the west of Ireland.

On the evening, the large crowd heard how Martin manages to produce E-grade bull weanlings for the export market and females for the domestic trade. He explained how he works a 100% AI system, while also working off-farm.

The farm, which is located east of Ballinrobe town, Co. Mayo, consisted of 27.64 ha of owned and rented, good-quality ground. Originally starting off with a Simmental-type cow, Martin now runs a herd of 16 three-quarter-bred Limousin dams mated to Belgian Blue sires each year. Maiden heifers are crossed back to Limousin genetics, while sexed semen was also introduced in 2023.

The sheep enterprise consists of Suffolk and Texel-cross ewes - split lambing at the start of February and then again around St. Patrick's day each year. The ewes are synchronised to leave the management during lambing easier. Lambs are sold through the South-Mayo Lamb Producer Group.

The suckler system is quite simple – a herd of top-quality E and U-grade cows capable of calving a top-quality calf and the ability to feed that calf with an abundance of milk. Also, that cow must calve every 365 days – a calving interval of 363 days was achieved in 2023/2024.

Calving starts on January 1<sup>st</sup> annually with all cows calved by the end of March. Top-quality grass is introduced at the end of March when the pairings are turned out for the year. While this might be considered late, early spring grass is prioritised for the early lambing ewes.

The cattle rotationally graze a 10-12 ac block on the home farm which is laid out in paddocks under a leader-follower system. The calves graze ahead of the cows allowing them to utilise quality, leafy grass before the cows. This also allows Martin to introduce meal prior to weaning. In 2023, average 200-day weights stood at 315 kg for the males, while the females weighed 271 kg at that stage.

An early application of protected urea is applied where possible. As Martin needs to prioritise grass early on in the year, first-cut silage is aimed for early June, with Martin closing paddocks which go too strong for

grazing throughout the grazing season – providing a top-quality winter feed source.

Second-cut silage generally takes place in July. The farm grew 10.6 t DM/ha in 2023 – well above the national average quantity grown on Irish drystock farms. Slurry is also spread in spring at a rate of 3,000 gals/ac.

Most of the machinery work is contracted out – allowing the Mayo-based farmer to focus on other important tasks around the farm.




Martin Shaughnessy - host farmer

With his relatively small herd of cows, Martin definitely operates at the higher end of the market for both males and females. In 2023, his average price for both males and females stood at €1,700/head – an impressive price for weanlings weighing between 300-400 kg.


Martin is also involved in the Teagasc Agricultural Catchments Programme – with the farm located in the Cregduff catchment.

This event was very kindly sponsored by FBD Insurance and the IGA would like to thank FBD for its continued support of the Beef Farm Walk.





**We would like to thank  
our sponsors FBD Insurance  
for their continued support**







## Key practices driving a successful Donegal enterprise

Darren Carty  
Past IGA council  
member and the Irish  
Farmers Journal



Over 300 farmers flocked to the IGA sheep farm walk in May to get a glimpse of the farming system run by Margaret and Jack Stevenson.

The Irish Grassland Association (IGA) sheep farm walk held on the farm of mother-and-son duo, Margaret and Jack Stevenson, in Liscooley, Co Donegal, attracted over 300 farmers keen to gain a first-hand view of the high-performing enterprise.

To briefly recap, the 68 ha grassland farm runs a flock of over 570 mid-season lambing ewes and ewe lambs alongside a 29 cow suckler-to-weanling enterprise. The whole farm stocking rate is 2.28 LU/ha (equivalent to 12 ewes/ha) or 153 kg organic nitrogen/ha.

### Concise planning

An overarching take-home message from the event is that meticulous planning lays the foundation for performance across all aspects of the business. The following are 10 standout messages from the day.

#### 1. Don't operate two flocks

Margaret says that a key focus on the farm is to keep management practices straightforward and to avoid a scenario of two flocks competing with each other.

As such, the aim is to have over 45% of lambs drafted

by mid-August and over 60% by mid-September. This allows ewes to be prioritised in the run-in to mating and avoids lambs competing with ewes for valuable grass supplies.

*Table 1 details the drafting pattern, average carcase weight and average price.*

2023 Lamb Sales			
Month	Cumulative Sales %	Carcass Wt Kg	Av.Price
July	4	21.1	152
August	45	21.8	137
Sept	63	22	137
Oct	86	21.8	139
Nov	97	20.3	134
Dec	100	20.8	138
Average		21.6	137

#### 2. High output gives scope for positive financial performance

The number of lambs sold/retained as replacements per ewe is very impressive and has consistently averaged around 1.8 lambs per ewe joined.

Figures presented equate to 39 kg carcase weight produced and an average lamb sales value per ewe of €247.

#### 3. Optimising carcase weights

Margaret told the large crowd in attendance that one of her favourite tasks is drafting lambs for sale, adding that the first thing she does when she receives factory remittance is to check the volume of free meat delivered.

Drafting takes place weekly during the peak season with lamb liveweights and kill out performance closely monitored to ensure lambs kill close to maximum carcase weight allowances without going overweight.

Monitoring performance allows lambs with lower potential to reach maximum carcase weights to be drafted once daily gain has stagnated.

#### 4. There is a place for strategic use of concentrates

Post-weaning ram lambs are batched into finishing groups with heavier ram lambs offered ad-lib concentrates. Margaret says that such lambs still have access to top-quality grass with ad-lib feeding tying in with labour availability and capitalising on exploiting terminal traits in lambs.

The cost of meal fed in 2023 was €24/ewe or €13 per lamb produced, significantly lower than typical levels.

A positive weaning weight (35.5 kg in 2023) and tight spread in lamb liveweight provides the basis for fast finishing.

#### 5. Sick animals won't thrive

The focus in terms of animal health is very much prevention is better than cure.

A closed flock policy is practised with a robust quarantine protocol for purchased rams.

Vaccines are used strategically while faecal egg counts play a central role in controlling internal parasites.

There were no lame sheep visible in the flocks seen and low levels of lameness are attributed to regular footbathing.

Two batch footbaths are set up side by side at the end of the race on the handling unit. This allows handling to continue while a batch of sheep are being handled and keeps tasks running efficiently.

#### 6. If you don't measure you cannot monitor performance

Measures are put in place to monitor key areas of performance. This includes animal performance, grassland productivity, soil fertility, silage quality, etc.

If any area of performance is not up to scratch, then contributing factors are reviewed to get to the route of the issue.

The farm grew approximately 12 t grass dry matter/ha in 2023 while silage typically tests in the mid-70s for dry matter digestibility. This is boosted by targeting a mid-May cutting day and taking surplus grass out of the rotation.

Margaret says: "If a dairy farmer can cut silage earlier, why can I not? Good silage will keep condition on stock and saves a lot of work in carrying buckets of meal."

#### 7. Feeding the soil

There is a renewed focus being placed on enhancing soil fertility. As can be seen in the charts below, a significant percentage of the farm is at index 1 and two for phosphorus (P) and potassium (K).

The farm's adviser, Eoin Gallagher, explains that with annual rainfall in Donegal exceeding 1,400 mm, it makes it more challenging to maintain soil pH and P/K at the desired status.

The latest soil samples identified that 300 t of lime is required across 18 land parcels.

Applying lime will address soil pH while rectifying pH levels will also improve P/K status and the efficiency of applied nutrients.

Slurry and farmyard manure was traditionally applied on lands close to the yard, but more strategic use is now being made of this valuable nutrient source.

The farm applied 103 kg chemical N/ha in 2023, 12 kg P/ha and 23 kg K/ha in 2023.

#### 8. Reaping the rewards from mixed grazing

There are no hard rules employed when it comes to mixed grazing.

A batch of cows and calves run with a bull and a batch of cull cows and in-calf heifers are used as a grassland management tool.

These grazing groups are joined where needed with sheep to graze out paddocks quicker and help to maintain top-quality grass ahead of stock.

#### 9. Tailor group size to paddock area

There are 32 fields/paddocks on the home farm and five divisions in the outfarm.

The average paddock size is 1.8 ha (4.6 acres) and many paddocks can be subdivided, if required.

The preference, however, is to group sheep in batches of 90 to 100 ewes and their lambs.

This is viewed as the optimum number during the first half of the year to graze paddocks efficiently and avoid additional work with splitting paddocks/altering water infrastructure.



## 10. Be open to change

Margaret and her late husband, Nicholas, were big fans of attending farm walks, a passion now carried on with her son Jack.

The Stevensons' humbly attribute many of the positive aspects of their farming system to knowledge they acquired when attending farm walks and events.

They have an open mind set to change and comment that to get the most out of a system you have to enjoy what you are doing.

This explains a minority of black-fleeced sheep scattered throughout the flock on the day, while another valuable take-home message is that decisions have to be made

sometimes to best suit labour availability.

### Key points

- A firm focus on farm planning and an open mind set to change is laying the foundation for positive performance.
- There is no store period with lambs, ensuring that lambs do not compete with ewes for grass.
- The suckler herd is used strategically to manage grass while also boosting output.
- Production from grass is driven by grazing management, grazing infrastructure and addressing soil fertility.



We would like to thank our sponsors Mullinahone Co-op for their continued support



## Dairy Summer Tour showcases Laois farms

Liz Duffy  
IGA council member  
and Teagasc



The Irish Grassland Association kicked off their Annual Dairy Summer Tour with the hugely popular social evening on July the 8<sup>th</sup> last. The evening, kindly sponsored by IFAC, was well supported by many of our corporate sponsors and members alike. Dinner was held in the Midlands Park Hotel in Portlaoise and the event proved to a very enjoyable social gathering and networking opportunity prior to the two-farm tour on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> July.

### Bruce Thompson

The Summer Tour was once again sponsored by AIB and was represented locally by Mick Conlon, AIB Agri Advisor. Despite an impending yellow weather warning, 250 attendees boarded the buses in Portlaoise and headed for our first port of call outside the village of Ballyfin. Bruce Thompson, his family and farm team run Camcloon Dairy, a 250 Ha farm of 275 cross-bred cows & young stock. Bruce is a popular and well-known Farming for Nature Ambassador and Nuffield Scholar. He is married to Laura and they have two young children, Keelin and Cooper. To set the scene, Bruce, firstly gave us an overview of the farm and his pathway into dairy farming. Leaving secondary school in 2001 in very different economic times, he studied engineering before returning home to help his father, Ian, on the home farm through a difficult TB breakdown. Since then, they have leased land and housing facilities, purchased quota and grown the herd steadily to the 275 cows that will be milked for 2024. Total land area farmed is 250 Ha with 100 Ha on the milking block. The 12 unit herring-bone parlour was upgraded to a 40 bail rotary parlour in 2018 around the time when the decision was taken to incorporate Jersey genetics to the mainly British Friesian herd. Bruce highlighted the importance of open communication and maintain good open relationships within his farm team and the 5 landlords he works with.

On the 2nd stop discussions centred round the farm system: Cows, labour, soil fertility and grassland management. Herd EBI currently stands at €233 with milk at €77 and fertility at €101. 2024 calves are at €295 EBI and €91 for milk and €131 for fertility. Physical performance of the herd in 2023 was 461 kgs/MS per cow delivered on 1.1 t of meal per cow at 4.95% fat and 3.71% protein and an average SCC of 128K. Like the majority of farms in 2024, milk output has been under pressure due to difficult weather and grazing conditions

throughout the main grazing season. The ideal cow for Bruce is an animal that can produce 1.2 times her body weight in milk solids from one tonne of meal and high grass utilisation and this is the direction breeding will take on the farm – cow selection for breeding replacements being a key integral part alongside EBI and bull selection. Bruce has prioritised having €200 per cow in the bank and 20% additional silage in the pits as a buffer to get through Spring 2025 and is willing to sell stock to achieve these two goals. For 2024 he has reduced the milking platform stocking rate on the farm from 3.1 to 2.75 LU/Ha again in response to the specific challenges that weather and grazing conditions have brought. These type of decisions emphasise the dynamic approach Bruce is willing to take to optimise output and keep cost control and profitability front and centre.

Moving on to the third stop of the morning we got to delve into the day-to-day dynamics of work organisation on the farm. Bruce has 2 full-time members of staff, Nick and David. He takes a student every year and also has 2 relief milkers for weekends. Bruce's Dad, Ian also takes an active role on the farm team. The bulk of the slurry and silage is done by contractors but due to the fragmented nature of the farm they complete the majority of fertiliser spreading themselves. In order to effectively manage and prioritise day to day and seasonal tasks, Bruce is very keen to assess and adopt any technology that can streamline labour input on the farm. Bruce and his team take advantage of phone apps such as Trello and TimeTree which offer shared calendars, identification & notification of tasks, scheduling/checklists etc. This allows all rosters to be shared, responsibility for tasks to be clear and overall minimising any possible breakdown in communication amongst all team members. The team meeting every two weeks is an integral part of keeping all the wheels in motion. Rostering, task identification and prioritisation are all discussed. This meeting also give the team an opportunity to review the past two weeks work. Bruce highlighted that he took two approaches from his wife Laura's teaching profession in relation to performance review. W.W.W, – 'what went well' and E.B.I. – 'even better if.....' so in a round-about way all of the team get the chance to say what worked and what could have gone better. This approach means work organisation can be reviewed in real time and changes documented for the next time.



The final stop gave us an insight to Bruce's passion project. The overarching observation was that while Bruce is running a successful Dairy business he has both the time and the enthusiasm to give to enhancing all aspects of biodiversity on the farm. In 2020 Bruce undertook a Nuffield Scholarship focussing on the plight of the dung beetle. By reducing anthelmintic use he has not only helped build a thriving dung beetle population but also reduced costs without compromising on animal performance. Bruce has gone on to co-ordinate an EIP project within his discussion group that focuses on a targeted and selective approach to animal wormers in order to protect and increase dung beetle populations on the land. In 2023 Bruce was conferred an Ambassador as part of the Farming for Nature network. The aims of the organisation are to promote and work with farmers to enhance the natural health of the countryside. Bruce emphasised his outstanding commitment to land stewardship for the next generation by highlighting that he would like to be remembered not for an excellent six week calving rate or kilos of milk solids per cow but rather for the enduring legacy of improving the biodiversity and the natural landscape of the farm.

#### Key actions for biodiversity to date:

- New sediment settlement ponds adjacent to yard
- Pond for nature/aquatic species on the milking platform
- 'Hands-off' management of hedgerows as field margins (act as corridors for wildlife movement and connectivity)
- Native tree planting – Oak trees with trees guards panted in parkland style out in grazing paddocks
- Bird boxes
- Promoting dung beetle populations

Overall, we had an excellent and enjoyable morning with a great addition that Brenda Donoghue from RTE Radio 1 Countrywide Programme joined us to interview sections of the participants - so you can listen back as a podcast! Bruce's approach to farming showcased that biodiversity can happily and easily exist on a profitable commercial dairy farm, his attitude and management style is central to the success of the business and the highly effective team. Discussions at the various stands were facilitated by council members Mike Egan & Ed Payne.

#### Roy & Trevor Cobbe

Following a quick pit stop for lunch in Portarlington GAA club we then headed for the farm of Roy and Trevor Cobbe. They run the Doolagh pedigree registered Holstein Friesian herd of 120 cows just outside Portarlington. Roy and Trevor are a refreshing example

of a successful family partnership and both contributed greatly to the discussion on the day. On the first stop Roy outlined the background to the farm from his days running a herd of 40 cows and other mixed enterprises and the wish he had to grow the business to allow his son Trevor to come home farming full-time. Trevor himself admitted he felt he 'came late' to farming and was not overly involved as a youngster. After school he went on to complete 3rd level but this just revealed to him that he could never do an indoor office based job. Roy was keen to make the business viable for them both and was delighted to encourage his son into the business. From this they embarked on completely evolving the business by increasing the herd from 40 to 120 cows, investment and development in key areas of: grazing infrastructure, paddock system and farm roadways, additional animal housing and slurry storage and calf rearing. At this first stop we clearly saw the wonderful relationship that exists between Roy and Trevor, they share a strong and cohesive partnership, unified in their vision for the business. They openly challenge each other and engage in candid discussions on a regular basis.

The total farm area consists of 82 Ha (41 leased) with a milking block of 41 Ha. The milking platform is stocked at 2.7. Current EBI of the herd is €235 with a breakdown of fertility of €125 (top 2% of herds) and a milk figure of €49. In 2023 the herd supplied 544 kgs/MS/Cow which due to the difficult year experienced by many was a 6% drop on the 578 kgs/Cow supplied in 2022. Fat and Protein in 2023 were 4.48% and 3.55% respectively with and average SCC of 129K. Meal input to the herd was approx. 1.3 t/Cow. Fertility performance of the herd for 2024 was excellent with KPI's of 89% calved in 6 weeks, a 370 day calving interval. Banding of 106 kgs N per cow has pushed the farm into derogation however the Cobbes have no interest in increasing cow numbers currently, the whole farm is stocked at 2.1 LU/Ha. The breeding and reputation of the herd allows them to maximise farm output through heifer sales.

At the second stop, the focus was on grassland management and the breeding policy—two areas where Trevor has set clear goals. He demonstrated a strong commitment to breeding management and pays close attention to detail. The EBI of the calves born in 2024 is €292 with significant improvements in % fat & protein whilst raising fertility to €125 and milk to €81. Milk recording has been on-going since 2003 and the herd pedigree registered for 13 years. The ideal cow for the Cobbes' is 70% Holstein and 30% British Friesian. Cow selection and bull selection are important for Trevor and whilst the maintenance figure for the herd is €12 it is not a figure Trevor puts any great focus on. The

aim is to capitalise on a solids-focussed fertile herd of mature cows: the target here to have 60% of the herd at 3+ lactations.

Trevor has clear discipline when it comes to grassland management. This starts with a farm walk every 5 days from late March on. This allows Trevor and Roy to make the right grazing decisions for the week ahead and have an effective plan for keeping quality grass in front of cows throughout the season. They invested in LESS slurry spreading equipment a number of years ago and this combined with clover inclusion to reseed has allowed them better manage their on-farm nutrients and reduce the total chemical N spread. This has been assisted through regular soil sampling, a liming programme and addressing P & K where needed. Pasturebase records show 15.2 t DM/Ha grown in 2023. To achieve high levels of grass utilisation Trevor had a few simple messages:

- Regular walking & know pre-grazing covers
- Watch the grass on the next 4-5 paddocks
- Take out surpluses immediately
- Jump ahead and graze back

For the final stop of the day we went fully interactive with live WhatsApp polls to tackle the key questions Roy and Trevor have at this stage of their farm development journey. The final piece of the jigsaw is the upgrading of the milking facilities. In 1994 Roy installed a 4 unit parlour for the 40 cows he was milking at that time. Since then he added an additional 2 units and they now have a 6 unit double-up system. Milking time in spring was taking up to 5 hours with both Roy and Trevor in the pit. They both realise this is unsustainable for any number of reasons – work life balance being the main one. Council member Patrick Gowing presented us with capital costs for both a 20 unit parlour and a robotic milking system (2 robots). The milking facilities and associated works were costed at approx. €360K for the robots and €327K for the conventional system – so not substantially different. It is the other considerations of each system that required the most thought and created great debate and discussion on the day.

In conclusion, following consideration on the pro's and con's of both systems both Trevor and Roy concurred that a conventional 20 unit parlour would probably suit their system best. The point was stressed that switching to robots by no means necessitates any change to the basic system of 100% spring calving, grass based system that the Cobbes have so effectively put in place. They have a road crossing to contend with but fundamentally Trevor loves milking his cows and the scale of their operation allows him to have great focus on breeding and husbandry of the herd and he would be slow to change that.

Discussions at the various stands were facilitated by council members Patrick Gowing and Vincent Griffith and local Teagasc Dairy Advisor Donnchadh Dowling.

Once again the Dairy Summer tour was one of the landmark events of the IGA calendar, attracting great numbers of attendees, providing great technical messages and needless to say a great social outing.



The Thompson Family



The Cobbe Family

**We would like to thank AIB  
for their continued support**







Bryan and Deirdre Hynes

## A difficult farming year but a rewarding one as IGA President

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA council member  
and Yara



### Bryan's year as President

I caught up with outgoing IGA president, Bryan Hynes recently to chat about his term as president of the IGA and learn more about the dairy business that he operates with his wife Deirdre in Co. Galway and Co. Clare. On the presidency, Bryan said he was "extremely honoured to be made vice president initially and then president of the IGA." Bryan joined the IGA council in 2018, the same year as he hosted the student conference. The principles of the IGA and its professionalism are what drew Bryan's interest in joining the IGA as a member first and years later as a council member in 2018. "It's a very transparent organisation, putting grassland to the fore at every opportunity for the betterment of Irish farmers, and this is driven by council members as events are planned and executed. I had my first real exposure of this process when I hosted the student event back in 2018," he said. Bryan sums up his year as president as a super experience, highlighting that a voluntary organisation like the IGA rely heavily on the goodwill of members, corporate members and event sponsors to fund the organisation so that it can run high quality events each year "showcasing the best Irish beef, sheep and dairy farms up and down the country". Bryan gives a particular mention to the great work that council perform, thanking their hard work and commitment to the organisation.

Looking back on the farming year, Bryan said "The last 12 months coinciding with my term in office has been an incredibly wet and challenging year to farm, the spring was tough where people had to buy fodder and extra feed and this had a heavy financial toll on many farms." Farmers needed a good year for grass, and this didn't happen, with grass growth rates back 1 to 2 tonnes of DM/ha this year and that comes at a cost for farmers. He goes on to say that farmers would have budgeted on that feed at the start of the year and if it doesn't grow it shows how exposed we can be to the best and cheapest feed source. It's years like this you realise how important grass is for producing lamb, beef and milk and shouldn't be taken for granted, Bryan adds.

The highlights of his term as president have been the events, kicking off with the autumn student event down in Tipperary, followed by the dairy conference in Charleville back in January, followed by a busy summer which included the sheep, beef and dairy summer tour which drew hundreds of people to see four excellent farms across the country. "It's great to see people enjoy these events because I know the work that goes on behind the scenes from our chairpersons and their committees to Maura Gallery our office manager and all the people who work so hard to pull off these events, it's months if not a year of preparation that goes into

each of these events," said Bryan. To conclude on his year as president, Bryan mentions how proud he is of everyone for doing such a good job and how much he enjoyed his 12 months, and he wishes John Farrell the best of luck as he takes the reins and all the new council members joining for the first time.

### The Hynes Farming Journey

Bryan completed an arts degree at NUIG after which he started working for the Irish Farmers Journal as a news correspondent for three years up to 2012. Then in the spring of 2013 he calved down 50 heifers and started milking in partnership with a neighbour in Clarinbridge. By 2017 they were milking 160 cows in Clarinbridge, during which time his then partner, now wife Deirdre was getting more involved in the business. Deirdre left her job as a nurse at the end of 2017 and they left the partnership and leased a 160 acre farm in north Clare which also included a 100 acre winterage and went farming together. They took 80 cows from Clarinbridge and bought 120 heifers and calved down 200 cows in the spring of 2018, the same year as the 'beast from the east'. Bryan said "I'll never forget it, how tough it was that first spring, and he remembers how his new neighbours in the Burren joked that they'd never see snow there and low and behold in our first March we couldn't keep snow off the sheds." During these busy years of setting up this new farm in Clare, he received a Nuffield scholarship and his study focused on models for managing multiple dairy units. They lived on the farm for those early years while developing the farm. Bryan fondly remembers this time, and the great friends they made. They were no longer milking on the home farm in Clarinbridge and were using this for silage and heifers. In 2019 they leased a farm in Corrandulla, Co. Galway which was 20 minutes north of the home farm. Bryan said, "We didn't need this farm at the time, but we thought it might give us options down the line." For 2020 they went contract rearing on their home farm and they stocked the newly leased farm with their own heifers. They had always toyed with the idea of going back milking on the home farm but thought it mightn't be viable because of the size of the farm. A conversation with Rhys Williams in Wales while Bryan was researching his Nuffield scholarship convinced them that it was viable since the grazing infrastructure already existed on the farm. After Bryan and Deirdre got married in late 2019, and the next year they began planning a new 22-unit milking parlour and started milking there in 2021. They milk 66 cows on the home farm and it takes an hour in the morning and evening to do the milking. Bryan said "The farm in Clarinbridge goes hand in hand with the farm in Clare, as I'm not milking in Clare as much so I

can milk in Clarinbridge and then go up to Clare to help out between milkings." They currently milk 250 cows between the two platforms now, calving all the cows in Clare. Bryan calls Clarinbridge a satellite farm because it doesn't have any housing facilities because they were very conscious at keeping costs down when starting the unit up there. Bryan jokes that the best two hours of the day are spent in Clarinbridge because the system is so simple, with just the cows to look after. The farm in Clare is nearly 2 kilometres long with road crossings, so they milk the older cows in Clarinbridge because it's a smaller farm and this gives these older cows a new lease of life. According to Bryan it's a win-win keeping the cows on the smaller unit, as they produce an extra 50 kg of solids per lactation compared to having them in Clare and it keeps them in the herd longer.

After a hectic couple of years Bryan and Deirdre are now working to consolidate the business and streamline the management of the two dairy units and the heifer farm in Corrandulla. Bryan says, "Priorities have changed since the arrival of our two boys, Conn and Maccan and creating a good work-life balance is important to both me and Deirdre." He believes strongly in the value of creating a positive working environment for everyone involved in the business. It's important to the couple that farming is seen as a good way of life for both their children and to entice new people into the industry.







## Navigating the challenges of 2024 on the Pringle family farm

Conor Holohan  
IGA council member  
and Make the Moove



John Pringle farms a mixed sheep and suckler beef enterprise in Kilacloran, Aughrim, Co Wicklow along with his wife Linda, daughter Lucy, and sons William and Scott. On the 58 ha farm they run a suckler calf-to-beef operation with 45 cows, finishing all stock on the farm, and a mid-season flock of 250 ewes. The family previously hosted the IGA Sheep Farm Walk in 2016, and John recently finished an eventful 3-year term as a member of the IGA council. Here he discusses the highs and lows of farming in 2024 and how he navigated a challenging year. He also reflects on his time on the IGA council and why more farmers should get involved.

### What have been the biggest challenges on the farm in 2024?

John described 2024 as one of the hardest years he's faced in farming. The biggest struggle being the erratic weather, with a prolonged cold and wet spring followed by periods of low rainfall which significantly impacted grass production. "We were just getting the cows out to grass when that cold spell hit. It set us back weeks," he said.

The sheep side of the business faced its challenges too, and while lambing itself went relatively well, the lambs were hardest hit by the poor weather. "We had to stay on top of everything to keep them in decent shape", John explained. An outbreak of joint ill and wet conditions in the following weeks felt like a "sucker punch".

There was little respite for much of the summer too, such was the unpredictable nature of the weather. John described it "like a constant game of chess", with quick reactions required and stock having to be moved more often than usual. Poor ground conditions in spring also curtailed machinery access to fields and delayed some essential tasks, such as the fencing off a newly planted 800 metres of hedgerow on the farm.

### Have there been any successes this year?

Despite the challenges, there have been positives on the farm. John highlighted the introduction of red clover to his silage swards as one of the success stories of the year. While red clover content in the sward appeared low in the first cut, he stated that "it came to life" in the subsequent second and third cuts, with the prospect of a fourth cut on the horizon this autumn.

It is apparent that John isn't afraid to think outside the box and try new ways of doing things. Each year he sets aside a small pot of money for what he describes as "little experiments on the farm". This year he trialled the use of foliar fertiliser which he was very happy with in terms of grass production. Interestingly, he also saw an opportunity to apply micronutrients to grazing swards with the foliar spraying method. As the farm is situated in a cobalt-deficient area, he decided to incorporate cobalt into the foliar fertiliser mix, which has reduced the need to dose lambs every fortnight.

John has also turned to an old piece of equipment in the yard this year, an aeration machine which had been gathering dust in recent years. He noticed that the combined effects of heavy rainfall and stock treading created a compacted layer on the soil surface which was impacting grass growth particularly in dry periods. According to John the aeration has worked well in allowing water to infiltrate through the shallow layer of topsoil into the shale below and he has seen a noticeable improvement in sward productivity. He noted that "it's not a magic fix, but it definitely helped."

### What motivates you to keep going in a tough year like this?

For John, the simple joys of farming provide motivation. "When you see the lambs playing in the field, or the cows out grazing, it reminds you why you're doing it," he said. He's also grateful for the help of his family. "We have three kids, and they're all interested in farming. It keeps you going, knowing they're part of it." John also takes pride in the environmental work they've done on the farm over the years. "We've planted hedgerows, and it's brilliant to see the wildlife returning. It's a small thing, but it makes a difference."

He also mentioned that there is always the prospect of better times ahead and stressed the importance of focusing on the good things that are coming down the line. He used the example of genetics, with a new bull and ram used on the farm this year, and the excitement that comes with seeing how next year's calves and lambs will turn out.

### Do you have any personal strategies or routines that help you manage the stresses of farming?

Going off farm for a walk in the evenings or weekends is something that John values greatly, either walking with someone and having a chat or simply putting the earphones in and listening to a podcast. Time spent with family is also important, and he enjoys going to watch his kids play sports and the opportunity to take his mind off farming for a while.

John also emphasised the importance of talking with other farmers and the role that his discussion group plays. "We head to Scotland every year for a few days - it's a chance to switch off, talk through things, and come back with a clear head," he shared.

### How have you enjoyed your time on the IGA council and how has it influenced you?

John volunteered as an IGA council member for the past 3 years and believes more farmers should consider joining. For him the experience has enabled him to meet and learn from other farmers and people working in various parts of the agricultural industry, many of whom he may not have met otherwise. He particularly

enjoyed being involved in organising events. He speaks fondly of "the buzz" of seeing plans come together and the positive feedback from attendees.

John believes his time on the council has broadened his perspective. "Being on the council, you pick up new ideas - from conferences, farm visits, and talking to other farmers. It gives you a chance to see different systems and try new things," he said.

### How do you balance the demands of farming with your role on the council?

The switch to more virtual meetings has made balancing the two easier for John. "Zoom calls have been a blessing. It saves on travel time and makes it easier to fit things in," he said. He also reserved particular praise for IGA Office Manager Maura Callery on the huge amount of work she does behind the scenes to ensure the continuity and growth of the organisation. In addition he shared his appreciation for his fellow council members who welcomed him onto the team and who work diligently throughout the year to deliver newsletters, conferences, farm walks, and other events.

### What advice would you give to young or new farmers facing their first challenging year?

John's advice is clear. "Talk to other farmers and don't go it alone." He stressed the importance of joining a local discussion group or talking things through with peers. "Everyone's been in the same boat at some point - talking to others lifts the weight off your shoulders," he advised.

### Do you have any future goals or new projects planned for the farm that you're excited about?

The main project on the farm at the moment is a new shed which is under construction. Building on this year's red clover success, John plans to use more red clover on the farm for silage ground and hopes to incorporate it into grazing mixes as well in the near future. There are also discussions about moving towards a more circular farming system or the "old way of farming" as he describes it. This would see the reintroduction of cereal crops on the farm to provide feed grain and straw for the livestock enterprises. John is a keen reader of old farming books and believes there is a lot to learn from the wisdom of those who farmed in the generations before us.

Looking ahead, John remains optimistic. With his family's involvement, a focus on innovation, and a willingness to adapt, the future looks positive for the farm

"You've got to keep learning and changing - that's what keeps farming interesting."



# Fodder Budgeting for the winter period 2024

Dr David Lawrence  
IGA council member  
and Brett Brothers



## Introduction

Forage stocks were low on many farms entering the grazing period in 2024, following a full six month housed period for many. The 2024 grazing season turned out to be a difficult season for grass growth and quality, with supply of grass expected to be at least 1.5 t/ha back on the previous year. As a result, surplus silage taken from the grazing platform was minimal; much of which, was fed out to livestock in the late summer early autumn following a period of dry conditions in the southeast and wet conditions in the west-northwest. The purpose of this article is to highlight an approach to fodder budgeting which considers many aspects of individual farm situations and offers a guide to managing a farmer's forage stocks throughout the winter period. The approach is divided into two parts, assessments and decisions.

## Assessments

### 1. Assess your Current Forage Stock.

Measure accurately in feet or meters the size of each silage pit in the yard, be sure to remark the silage type beside each measurement and some of the characteristics you remember about the silage (it was very dry going in for example), this will help to gauge how the silage is likely to feed out on the farm. Wet stemmy silage will have a slower feed out than dry sweet silage when offered ad libitum. Also remark on the acreage and approximate yield in each pit, as this will help confirm the accuracy of the fodder budget calculations.

Get an accurate count on available bale silage. For large heaps that are difficult to count, your silage contractor will often keep a record of the number of bales they produced on each cut. If possible, weigh a couple of bales from each cut to get a better understanding of the total yield of silage fresh weight. Remark on additional forage sources, for example bales of hay or maize silage. Include available feeding straw only, and not straw that will be needed for bedding. If possible, it is useful to weigh straw bales to better understand the total quantity of fresh weight available.

### 2. Assess your Current Livestock.

Get an accurate count on the livestock you currently keep, and what you plan on keeping for the winter. Scanning cows and heifers will determine what

breeding stock is available to off-load. Weighing weanling and store cattle will help determine if there are a cohort that could be finished early, making more grass available for weanlings and prolonging the grazing season. Forward weanlings may be worth selling before the winter as opposed to after the winter housing period for example.

Carry out an accurate assessment of the body condition score (BCS) of your breeding stock. Suckler cows often return to housing with one full unit of BCS surplus to requirement (3.5 vs. the target 2.5 for calving), this equates to approx. 150-170 UFL of energy availability that can be utilised by restricting silage allowance in the early winter housing period, that's a saving of 550 kg silage fresh weight (@ 0.82UFL and 25% DM). Dairy cows that have had a difficult grazing season in the back end may enter housing in poor BCS for example. In this scenario consideration must be taken to account for feed allowance, feed space and the availability of high-quality forage. If high-quality forage is limited it must be reserved for fresh cows and light weanling heifers. For mediocre (dry cow) silage additional supplement should be considered as 1 unit of BCS gain will require 230 kg of concentrate which should be applied as early as possible to ensure the correct BCS is achieved at the point of calving.

### 3. Assess Silage Quality

Knowing the quality of your silage will give you an advantage in understanding not only what silage to feed to different groups and when to feed it out, but also exactly how much, so over feeding is minimised. Good silage should be prioritised for weanling cattle, freshly calved cows and cows in poor condition. Good quality silage for dry cows will need to be restricted to avoid over conditioning and understanding this may help correct forage deficits. While a forage nutritional test is critical, it is also wise to test silage for minerals. This helps make informed decisions particularly around dry cow nutrition. For example, if straw is being allocated to dry cows to stretch silage, there may be ideal opportunities to add straw to the silage with the highest level of potassium or antagonists. If there is a higher degree of soil contamination in one pit, this pit should be utilised earlier in the dry period rather

than later, to minimise the prevalence of retained afterbirth for example.

### 4. Assess Cost of Purchased Feeds

Often, what we perceive as an expensive price for forage is better value once we compare it to other options in terms of dry matter. Please consider table 1. If you input the fresh weight of your unit of feed for example 1,000 kg of concentrate, multiply this by the dry matter and divide your answer by 100 [(1,000 x 86)/100] this will give you the quantity of dry matter you are buying per unit. If you divide your price per unit by the quantity of dry matter and multiply that answer by 1,000, this will give you the euro value per ton of dry matter, which is a fair way to compare the value of feed stuffs.

Table 1. The relative cost of feeds in terms of dry matter

Feed	Fresh Weight kg	Dry Matter	Dry Matter Available kg	Cost €	Cost € Per Ton DM
	A	B	C	D	E
			(A*B)/100=C		(D/C)*1000=E
Bale silage	750	28%	210	55	260
Maize silage	1000	30%	300	75	250
Fodder beet	1000	19%	190		
Concentrate	1000	86%	860		
Starw 4x4	150	86%	130		
Hay 4x4	250	85%	210		
Brewers Grain	1000	22%	220		
Zero graze grass	5000	15%	750		

(fill in your own costs for feed to calculate the cost per ton of DM)

## Decisions

### 1. The Decision to Purchase Feed Stuff

The decision to purchase additional feed stuff should be made on more considerations than the mere cost of it. If your feed budget is within a good range, you have flexibility in your options to maintain or manage the forage you already have available. However, if your feed budget is in a severe deficit > 20% then you really need to consider that access to forage is your primary concern. In extreme circumstances diets can be successfully formulated to include 50% forage DM and can go beyond this with professional supervision and guidance in the short term.

Ask yourself these four questions,

- Where am I going to store the additional feed and is the storage suitable?
- How long will it take me to feed out the purchased feed, is there a risk of spoilage?
- How will I allocate the feed, is it practical for my farm?
- How will I finance the additional expenditure?

### 2. The Decision to Cull Stock

This decision should be made in a timely manner, as the earlier animals leave the farm the greater the reduction in forage demand. If you have a successful year for breeding, there may be an opportunity to selectively cull additional stock and retain more heifers for this coming season. This will help a fodder deficit as heifers consume less silage dry matter than mature cows. If you decide to retain cull stock for finishing, please consider that an increase in concentrate will have a substitution effect on your silage thus reducing forage requirement. The decision to cull additional stock may help you finance the purchase of additional forage and feed stuffs.

### 3. The Decision to graze Late

Be cautious with grazing late as additional grass volume in the spring is impacted by grazing beyond the 15th of November. However, on wetter farms this may present an opportunity to reduce forage requirement particularly for youngstock, as previous years have shown that spring grazing may be less achievable on wet farms. Consider an old expression that a wheelbarrow of grass in the spring is like feeding a trailer full in the autumn. Animals tend to perform better on spring grass in early or mid-lactation, than they do on autumn grass in late lactation. Your spring grazing cover will form part of your fodder budget, and it is important to consider the opportunities that this can present.

## Conclusion

Use some of the widely available fodder budget self-assessment sheets. If you are concerned by the results of one of these assessments, seek professional advice from an agricultural consultant or nutritionist. Remember these 4 points.

1. Make all your assessment early and continue to reassess to monitor progress.
2. Do not eat into your straw budget for bedding.
3. Forage is most important; you need at least 50% of the diet DM to be forage.
4. Reach out to professionals who can help you with both assessments and decisions.

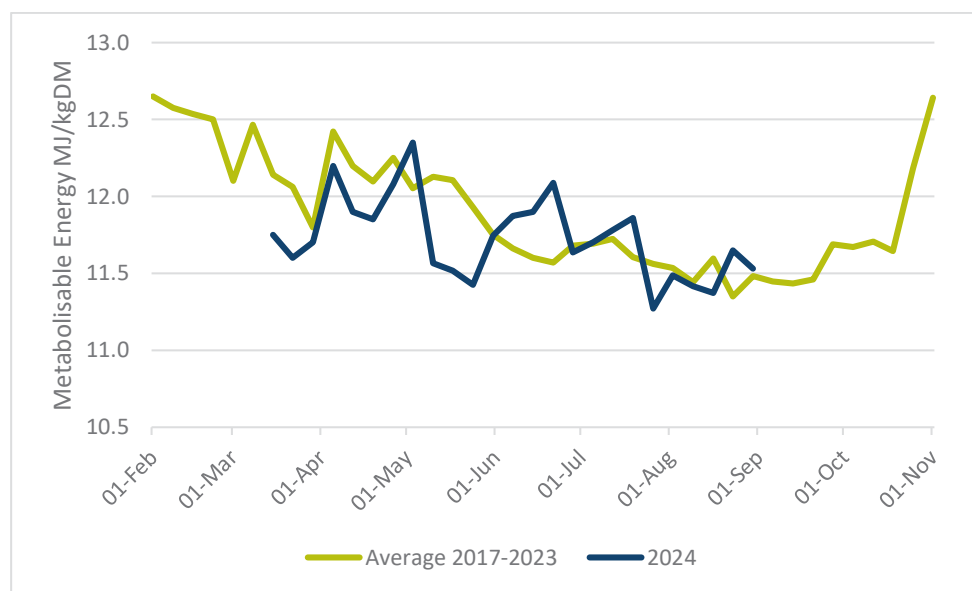


## Key learnings from 2024 grazing season

A delayed, wet spring followed by a summer of cooler temperatures, lack of sunshine and continuous rain certainly exposed any livestock farmer's versatility with regards to grazing management. Poor grass growth in the early season, a burst of growth mid-May, and a subsequent rapid decline to below average growth meant that it was practically impossible to respond to changes in grass growth; hence the average farm cover (AFC) on monitored farms was often either too low or too high, and rarely on target. Fodder reserves were further depleted during periods of poor grass growth and there has been little opportunity to replenish these reserves leaving many farms short going into the winter.

Delayed turnout resulted in cows grazing heavy covers of wet grass in the 1<sup>st</sup> rotation, leaving behind poor residuals, which had knock-on consequences in terms of grass quality and growth in the 2<sup>nd</sup> rotation. Compared with 2017-2023 average, grass Metabolizable Energy (ME) was 0.4MJ/kg DM lower (see Figure 1) and Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF) was 2% higher on average during March and April – indicating poorer quality spring grazing in 2024. Grass dry matters were surprisingly very similar to 2017-2023 seasonal average, however much bigger variations in dry matter were recorded during 2024. Grass quality improved in June, but this was driven by monitor farms grazing unfavorably low pre-grazing covers of below 1,200 kg DM/ha (i.e. leafy immature swards), as grass growth quickly declined again. Grass dry matter intakes on average across the season were estimated to be down by 2 kg DM/head/day across monitor farms due to an array of factors across the season: lower quality, lower dry matter, reduced availability and cold, wet and windy grazing conditions. Due to the reduction in grass quality combined with lower intakes, cows struggled to reach their usual peak yields in early lactation and cattle thrive was also compromised. Consequently, despite monitor farms offering more compound feed (average 1kg) milk production was reduced (average 2 liters) compared to previous years. However, milk protein, body condition and fertility were comparable to previous years for most farms– indicating a similar energy balance compared to previous years.

**Figure 1.** Seasonal trend in grass metabolizable energy



Grass crude proteins were significantly lower for most of 2024 compared with 2017-2023, see Figure 2; on average 3% lower across the season. This is likely a result of restricted nitrogen uptake by grass, due to a range of different factors throughout the year (cooler temperatures, soil moisture deficits, lack of sunshine, etc.). Milk urea's in many cases were in the mid to low 20's (mg/dl) – indicating a sufficient supply of rumen degradable protein (RDP), relative to rumen fermentable energy. When crude protein in grass drops below 20% (especially below 18%), higher yielding cows could be limiting in rumen undegradable protein (RUP) and therefore deficient in metabolisable protein and more importantly metabolisable amino acids, particularly methionine and lysine. Protein in grass is mainly RDP with very little RUP.



**Figure 2.** Seasonal trend in grass crude protein

One positive noted during the season was that milk fat depression was less of an issue on farms. This is a result of 2<sup>nd</sup> rotation grazing being more coarse (i.e. higher in fiber and lower in sugars and oil) compared to previous years. Additionally, reduced milk yields may have contributed to a dilutional effect that may help maintain the milk fat percentage on previous years. The prolonged period of buffer feeding, continuing into the middle of 2<sup>nd</sup> rotation is also expected to have helped. There was also a notable reduction in the frequency and severity of summer scour syndrome cases reported in calves, which may have arisen from delayed turn out (due to inclement weather) resulting in additional maturation time for the rumen, and lower protein, coarse grass available for first and second rotations.

### Key Learnings 2024

1. Have a bank of good quality silage (ideally ME >11.7MJ/kg DM; dry matter >28%) for feeding during early lactation or for the prolonged housing of store cattle. This high-quality silage has a role to play during both early and late spring. For example, in an early spring a small quantity of a high-quality buffer feed fed until the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rotation will help maximize dry matter intakes, support milk yields and help prevent butterfat drops. On the other hand, during a poor spring having plenty of good quality silage available will reduce the need to turn cows out under unfavorable conditions, whilst ensuring early lactating cows are well supported.
2. During periods where grass intakes are challenged (be it wet weather, general poor grass quality or availability due to drought/cold conditions etc.), farmers should consult with a nutritionist to formulate a complementary buffer feed (grass silage, alternative forages, moist feeds, concentrate etc.) to correctly bridge any energy gaps. Animal performance should be optimized even if grazing conditions are suboptimal.
3. Be proactive in implementing corrective measures early (pre-mowing, topping, baling) during periods when target residuals are hard to achieve.
4. Remember milk urea only gives an indication of rumen protein - energy balance, it also is impacted by the rate of protein degradation. During periods of low grass crude protein (<20%) ensure RUP requirements are still met. Farmers should work with their nutritionist to meet the requirements of their animals based on the quality of grass or forage they are feeding.

### Conclusion

Every grazing season presents a set of challenges. The important thing is to learn from these challenges and implement changes in grazing management to safeguard and increase resilience for future grazing seasons.

*We would like to thank Claire Beckett and Rhonda Currie from Trouw Nutrition for contributing this article which provides really interesting insight into the nutritional attributes of grass and grazing performance during 2024.*





## Weathering the Winter: Practical tips for minding your wellbeing this winter

Conor Holohan  
IGA council member  
and Make the Moove



Winter can be a challenging time for everyone, but for farmers, the season often brings additional stressors. Shorter days, unpredictable weather, and the ongoing demands of farm management can lead to feelings of isolation, fatigue, and even depression. Since recently joining the team at 'Make the Moove', the rural mental health and support programme, it has become clear that demand for services is rising rapidly as the winter period approaches. This article offers some practical tips to help you maintain your wellbeing during the coming months.

### Understanding seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder, commonly known as SAD, is a type of depression that occurs at a specific time of year, usually during the winter months. It's more than just the "winter blues" however, SAD is a serious condition that can significantly impact a person's mood, energy levels, and overall wellbeing. Farmers, who often spend long hours working outdoors, are particularly vulnerable as daylight becomes scarce.

Common symptoms of SAD include:

- Persistent low mood
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness

- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in sleeping patterns (usually sleeping more)
- Changes in appetite or weight

Recognising these symptoms in yourself or others is the first step towards managing SAD and maintaining mental health during winter.

### Practical tips to cope with winter's challenges

#### 1. Maximize exposure to natural light:

- **Get outside:** Try to spend time outdoors during daylight hours, even if it's just for a short break. Exposure to natural light can help improve mood and energy levels.

#### 2. Stay physically active:

- **Regular exercise:** Physical activity is a proven way to boost mental health. Even in winter, find ways to stay active - whether it's taking a brisk walk, working out at home, or engaging in farm tasks that get your body moving.
- **Stretch and move indoors:** On particularly cold or dark days, doing indoor exercises like stretching, yoga, or using a stationary bike can be beneficial.

#### 3. Maintain a routine:

- **Structured days:** Stick to a regular daily routine to provide a sense of normality and control. This includes consistent wake-up and bedtimes, meal times, and work schedules.
- **Break tasks into manageable chunks:** Winter can be overwhelming with long to-do lists. Breaking tasks into smaller, manageable parts can reduce stress and provide a sense of accomplishment.

#### 4. Stay connected:

- **Social interaction:** Isolation can exacerbate feelings of depression. Make an effort to stay connected with family, friends, or neighbours. Regular check-ins, whether in person or via phone or video call, can make a big difference.
- **Join a discussion group:** Consider joining a local farmer discussion group. Sharing experiences and hearing from others who understand the unique challenges of farming can provide comfort and advice.

#### 5. Monitor your diet:

- **Balanced nutrition:** Eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can help regulate mood and energy. Be mindful of comfort foods and sugary snacks that might offer a temporary boost but can lead to energy crashes later.
- **Vitamin D:** With less sunlight in winter, vitamin D levels can drop. Consider taking a supplement after consulting with a healthcare professional.

#### 6. Prioritise sleep:

- **Good sleep hygiene:** Maintain a sleep-friendly environment - dark, quiet, and cool. Avoid screens before bed and try to relax with a book or calming activity.
- **Rest when needed:** Listen to your body and rest when needed. Overworking during winter can lead to burnout, exacerbating feelings of stress and depression.

#### 7. Seek professional help if needed:

- **Talk to someone:** If you're struggling, don't hesitate to reach out to a healthcare professional. A doctor or mental health counsellor can provide support, whether through therapy, medication, or other treatments.
- **Mental health hotlines:** Keep mental health hotline numbers handy. Talking to a trained professional can provide immediate relief and guidance. Contact details for a number of supports are included at the end of this article.

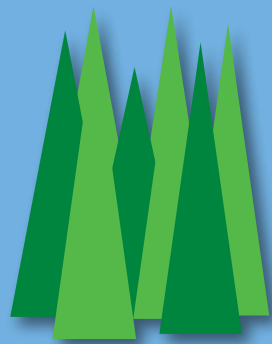
### Conclusion - Taking action for better mental health

Winter will always bring challenges, but by taking proactive steps, you can protect your wellbeing during this period. Recognising the signs of SAD and implementing practical strategies (like maximizing light exposure, staying active, and maintaining social connections) can make a significant difference. Remember, it's okay to ask for help. Your wellbeing is your most valuable asset, so this winter prioritise self-care and you will reap the benefits for your health and happiness.

### Some mental health support resources

- **Make the Moove** – A mental health initiative run by Macra na Feirme providing mental health training, crisis response, counselling services, and raising awareness about mental health issues in rural areas. Visit [www.makethemoove.ie](http://www.makethemoove.ie)
- **Aware** – National organisation providing free support, education and information services to people impacted by anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and related mood conditions. Freephone 1800 804848. Available Monday to Sunday 10am - 10pm.
- **Pieta House** 24hr Crisis Helpline – Freephone 1800 247 247 or text the word HELP to 51444 (standard message rates apply) to speak to a qualified therapist if you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, self-harming or have lost someone to suicide.
- **YourMentalHealth.ie** is a place to learn about mental health and how to support yourself and the people you love. You can find support services near you and learn about the little things that can make a big difference to how we all feel. Brought to you by the HSE, the National Office for Suicide Prevention and partner organisations across the country.
- **Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.** List of registered counsellors and psychotherapists practicing in Ireland. Visit [www.iacp.ie](http://www.iacp.ie) or call 01 230 3536.
- **Turn2me.ie:** Offers self-help, peer support and professional support through an online platform for those who are experiencing mental health difficulties.
- **Grow:** Mental health support and recovery organisation. Visit [www.grow.ie](http://www.grow.ie) or call 1818474474





# Irish Grassland Association CLG

**TO MOVE YOUR MEMBERSHIP TO THE IGA CLG  
PLEASE TEXT "MEMBERSHIP" TO 087 9626483  
AND WE WILL CONTACT YOU.**

