Irish Grassland Association

Members' Information Booklet

Issue No. 56. 2025

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

Irish Grassland Association

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

Contents

SUGGESTIONS & FEEDBACK PLEASE!

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

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Editorial

Philip Cosgrave
Editor and IGA Council Member

Webinar event to round off a very successful year for the IGA

Welcome to the latest edition of our members' information booklet. Just to remind our members that our fifth and final event for the year – 'Managing your Health and your Wealth' webinar takes place this Thursday evening at 8 pm, and crowns a busy and successful year for the IGA. Two excellent speakers – Shelley Atkins and Kieran Coughlan will provide expert advice on the themes of personal health and financial planning specific to farmers. To read more about this free online webinar go to page 12.

First up in the booklet is the important business of the AGM which took place in September. 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 Vincent Griffith on taking up his position as president. The association would like to thank outgoing president John Farrell for his time, dedication and stewardship of the IGA during his term as president.

For our first event of 2026, Liz Duffy our dairy conference chair outlines what's in store for delegates attending the social night and dairy conference on the 8 and 9 of January. The organising committee have put together a great line up of speakers and dairy farmers, to address the three key themes of the conference.

Great farms hosting our events made for great farm walks this summer, drawing large crowds to the beef, sheep and dairy summer tour. Niall Claffey reviews the beef event back in June, where over 400 people descended on Roscrea. Hear about the father and son duo combining a highly productive sheep flock and contract rearing dairy heifers in Sligo from Tom Coll, our sheep event chair. The dairy summer tour was an enormous success, so John McCabe's review is a must for anyone who might have missed this event.

PhD students Sinead Kearney and Cian Minogue update us on their research findings, having both presented at the European Grassland Federation symposium on multi species swards in Reading earlier in September. I'd like to thank Sinead and Cian for contributing to this year's information booklets and wish them every success in their future careers.

In our technical focus, IGA council member John O'Loughlin delves into grass economics and the fundamental role that soil fertility plays in underpinning grass production on farms and consequently farm profitability. Vet Brian O'Connell from Elanco discusses the control and treatment of liver fluke in cattle and sheep. While Patrick Cashman from Goldcrop and Pasture Innovations describes the process involved in bringing a new grass or clover variety onto the market.

And finally, John Farrell reflects on his year as IGA president which finished in September.

Philip Cosgrave,
Editor IGA publication.

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A selection of the IGA Team at the IGA CLG AGM in Mullingar

The 2025 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association CLG

Maura Callery
Office Manager and
Director of the IGA

The 2025 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association CLG (IGA) took place on 30th September in the Mullingar Park Hotel.

A presentation of the year's activities was presented to all by the outgoing President John Farrell. He thanked all outgoing council members on their retirement from the council. Our council members include some of the most progressive Irish agricultural scientists, consultants and highly efficient beef, sheep, and dairy farm producers. There is a wonderful diverse group of talented people on the council. John Farrell then welcomed the incoming President for 2025/6 Vincent Griffith.

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

Vincent Griffith elected IGA President 2025/6

Dairy farmer Vincent Griffith' took over as the newly elected President of the IGA CLG. Philip Cosgrave agronomist was announced as the new Vice President of the IGA.

Vincent Griffith has co-opted the following council members to strengthen his council during his presidential term. They are Sarah Woodmartin drystock Farmer and Teagasc Athenry, Martin Merrick drystock farmer and Irish Farmers Journal, and Brian McCarthy Teagasc, They will each serve one year on his team.

As there were no surplus seats at this year's AGM, William Burchill was deemed newly elected to the council. Alan Kelly, Paddy Casey, Eamon Sheehan, Liz Duffy and Lisa McGrane were deemed re-elected to council. All six elected council members will serve a full term of three years.

Ken Graham, Mike Egan, John Tobin and John Connell retired from council at the AGM

We had a super time meeting all our members in 2025. We have had record attendances at our summer events. We look forward to seeing you all in 2026

Retirements from the Council at the AGM

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

John Tobin
IGA Past Council Member
and Bord Bia

Michael Egan
IGA Past Council Member
and Teagasc

Ken Graham
IGA Past Council Member and
Beef Farmer and Engineer

Strong student voice on the new council

For the first time in the history of the IGA, we are delighted to now have three of our council members lecturing in colleges – Alan Kelly is a lecturer in UCD, Lisa McGrane has commenced a new post at ATU Donegal and William Burchill is working with UCC. This is a welcome addition to the dynamics on the council, as we always strive to encourage students to come to all our events, either free or at significantly reduced costs where a ticket purchase is required.

Alan Kelly
UCD

Lisa McGrane
ATU Donegal

William Burchill
UCC

New Council Members 2025

Brian McCarthy: Brian was invited onto the council by Vincent Griffith IGA President for a one-year co-opted term. He is a senior research officer in the grassland science department based in Teagasc Moorepark. Brian graduated from UCD in 2008 with a BAgSci. (Animal and Crop Production). Brian undertook a PhD in Teagasc Moorepark in conjunction with UCD from 2008 to 2011 investigating the effect stocking rate and calving date would have on the productivity of spring milk production systems in a no quota scenario. Since then, Brian has been working in Teagasc Moorepark and was the research officer in charge of Clonakilty Agricultural College from 2012 to 2024 where his main area of research was on the impact of including white clover and reducing nitrogen fertiliser application rates on the productivity of spring milk production systems. At the start of 2025, Brian moved to the Dairygold farm in Kilworth and is now working on the Next Generation Herd II project where he is focused on the impact of animal genetics and organic nitrogen stocking rate on system performance. Brian is also involved on research into animal nutrition and techniques to measure the dry matter intake of grazing dairy cows.

New Council Members 2025

William Burchill: William was elected to the IGA council in 2025 for three years. William is the FBD lecturer in Sustainable Agriculture (Soil Science) at University College Cork, since 2023. He is responsible for the delivery of soil science and agri-environmental science modules within UCC's agricultural science degree programme. William's research programme in UCC, predominantly focuses on soil fertility, nitrogen cycling, losses and use efficiency. Before joining UCC, William worked as a dairy advisory in Teagasc Kanturk as well as a discussion group facilitator on the Teagasc/Dairygold Co-op Joint Programme. William completed a PhD in Teagasc Moorepark (2010 – 2014) and Post-Doc (2014 – 2017) at Teagasc Johnstown Castle where he focused on aspects such as biological N fixation, N use efficiency and ammonia emissions. William also runs a contract heifer rearing enterprise on his farm in Co. Cork, with his wife – Ellen and family.

Sarah Woodmartin: Sarah was invited onto council by Vincent Griffith IGA President for a one-year co-opted term. Sarah qualified with a BAgrSc in animal science from University College Dublin (UCD), graduating in 2020.

Sarah then went on to complete a PhD in Teagasc Athenry (2020-2024) in conjunction with UCD entitled "Investigating the effect of legume and herb inclusion in combination with perennial ryegrass on pasture-based sheep production systems". This research focused on the effect of binary sward mixtures of perennial ryegrass plus white clover, red clover, chicory or plantain on dry matter intake, animal performance, methane output, rumen function and meat-eating quality, investigating the potential for these more diverse swards to enhance the sustainability of Irish pasture-based sheep production systems. Sarah spent a semester of her PhD studies at Massey University, New Zealand, collaborating with some of the world leading researchers in the area of botanically diverse swards.

Shortly after submitting her PhD thesis in October 2024, Sarah commenced her role as a sheep grassland nutrition research officer in Teagasc Athenry. Her work continues to focus on enhancing production efficiency in pasture-based sheep production systems, with the aim of improving the economic viability of sheep meat production while lowering its carbon footprint.

Sarah is actively involved in running her family's mixed enterprise farm in Co. Sligo, where they farm a prolific mid-season lambing ewe flock alongside a suckler cow herd. They also run a flock of free-range laying hens. Sarah's home farm focuses on efficient grassland management and successful animal breeding programmes.

Martin Merrick: Martin was invited onto the council by Vincent Griffith IGA President for a one-year co-opted term. He hails from Crossmolina in north Mayo, where the family farm operates a commercial and pedigree suckler herd alongside a mid-season lowland ewe flock. He completed his Bachelor of Agriculture degree in UCD in 2019, where he majored in animal and crop production, before spending two years with Teagasc on the MAEI programme. From here he worked from the Teagasc Ennis office with dairy advisor Aidan Bugler, advising farmers on achieving key targets with health, breeding and grass growth, while his second year was spent in Teagasc Ballina under drystock advisor Enda Geoghegan, facilitating drystock discussion groups.

In 2022, Martin joined the Irish Farmers Journal as a buildings specialist, where he covers farm building features, changes to TAMS costings and building specifications. He has been heavily involved in the Grass+ pages in the Farmers Journal on both the dairy and beef side, as well as marts and pedigree reporting. On the grass side, he is passionate about low input grazing systems and the use of red and white clover on drystock farms.

Meet the Team of the newly formed IGA CLG Council 2025/2026

Vincent Griffith
IGA President
and Dairy Farmer

L-R Vincent Griffith IGA President 2025/6
with outgoing IGA President John Farrell

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

Lisa McGrane
IGA Council Member,
Sucker to Beef Farmer
and ATU Donegal

Liz Duffy
IGA Council member
and Teagasc

Maura Callery
IGA Director
and Office Manager

Alan Kelly
IGA Past President
and UCD

Bryan Hynes
IGA Past President
and Dairy Farmer

Christy Watson
IGA past president
and Council Member

John Farrell
IGA Past President
Beef and Sheep Farmer
AIB Bank

Philip Cosgrave
IGA Vice President
and Yara

Brian McCarthy
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

Ciaran Mulligan
IGA Council Member and
Dairy Farmer

Conor Holohan
IGA Council Member
and UCD

Martin Merrick
IGA Council Member,
Drystock Farmer and
Irish Farmers Journal

Mike Bermingham
IGA Council Member
and Dairy Farmer

Niall Claffey
IGA Council Member,
Beef Farmer and
Elanco Animal Health

Nicky Byrne
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

Paddy Casey
IGA Council Member
Beef and Sheep Farmer

Sarah Woodmartin
IGA Council Member,
Suckler Farmer & Teagasc

Tom Coll
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

William Burchill
IGA Council Member
and UCC

Managing your Health and your Wealth

Dr David Laurence
IGA Council Member and
Brett Brothers

The IGA's last event of the year will be an online event and will focus on the very important topic of "Managing your Health and your Wealth".

This free webinar takes place on Thursday the 27th of November and will commence at 8pm sharp. You can find a link to join this webinar on the IGA's social media channels and via our website at **www.irishgrassland.ie**

Our autumn events have been sponsored by FBD since their inception 16 years ago. Without this long-standing support from FBD, it would not be possible to continue to deliver these wonderful events to our members.

There is no pre-registration for this webinar, just click the link to join! The overall aim for this event is to showcase the importance of managing both your health and wealth.

Commenting on the event Patricia O'Halloran FBD said, "FBD Insurance is proud to sponsor this event and to continue our valued partnership with the Irish Grassland Association. With deep roots in the agricultural sector, we are dedicated to supporting farmers and their enterprises. We look forward to an informative and engaging evening at this event in November, featuring two expert speakers addressing these timely and relevant topics."

Farmers are a crucial asset to their family and their family business. Their health and that of their family, contribute significantly to the success of their business and home life. Facing into the winter period we would hope that this very topical event will have attendees come away with practical steps on how achieve a healthier lifestyle and build wealth and security for themselves and their families.

Wealth and health are issues that we all must deal with, but we often deal with them reactively rather than proactively. The biggest challenges that we face in our lives can be health or financial related, and often one happens as a result of the other. Because farming is such a full-on profession, we don't always stop to think of the bigger picture and our long-term health and financial security. Dealing with stress effectively coupled with a healthy lifestyle and good financial planning can contribute significantly to ensuring a viable farm business is passed on to the next generation.

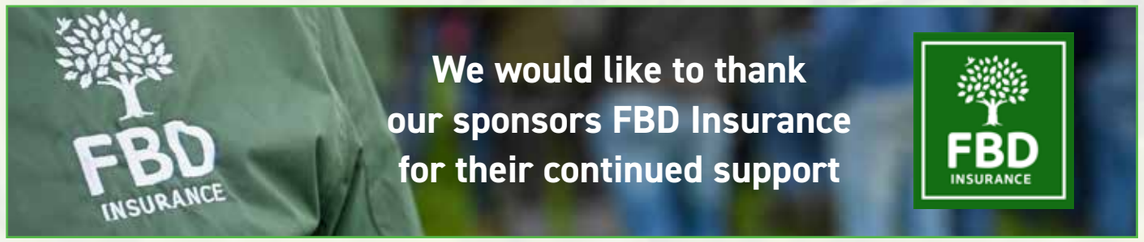
Financial problems can surface quickly when health problems arise, and seeking the right advice is crucial when they do. Both our speakers at this event are experts in their areas and will be on hand to answer questions and provide help to attendees on the evening.

Our first speaker is Kieran Coughlan, a well-known columnist with the Irish Examiner. He writes a regular column focusing on farm finance. Kieran also runs a very successful Agri-finance practice in Cork. His presentation will examine a cross section of different farm sectors, highlighting the volatility that exists presently and offering solutions as to how farmers can manage the financial stability of their business and take proactive approach to managing spend/profits/farm debt to match volatility and control taxes to stabilise their farm finances. Kieran will also look to the future and what retirement means for individual farmers, and the appropriate actions they need to take to ensure a comfortable transition from actively farming to retirement and succession.

Our second speaker is Shelly Atkins who is a Wexford native. Shelly works as a mental health nurse, and has her own personal coaching business where she focuses on joining healthy life habits to improve both physical and mental health. Shelly has an honours degree in mental health science and qualified in London for Sports and Fitness teaching and has worked in the sports industry for 25 years, coaching international world championship gymnasts. In addition to her busy work schedule, Shelly has a weekly health coaching slot on Southeast Radio.

We're delighted that Caitríona Morrissy from the Irish Farmers Journal will be our chair for this online event. Caitríona's vast experience and knowledge of farming matters will keep discussions engaging and focused for those participating in this event.

Please join this free online event and embrace a healthier future for you and your farm business. A messaging service will be available during this event, which will allow people type questions anonymously if they wish.



2026 Dairy Conference Gala Dinner and Social Night

Liz Duffy
IGA Council Member and Teagasc

Always a highlight on the IGA calendar and a great way to kick start the new year, our Gala Dinner and Social Night will be held in the Charleville Park Hotel in Co. Cork on Thursday 8 January in advance of our annual Dairy Conference on Friday 9.

Paul Hyland, IGA past president and dairy farmer will be hosting our after-dinner chat with farmer and businessman Michael Ward.

Michael Ward is a civil engineer by profession and now also a farmer. He owns one third of the 'Ward and Burke Group' that constructed €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, Co. Roscommon where he operates a 500-cow dairy herd with his share farming partner, Andrew Clarke. Michael grew up on a mixed dairy, beef and sheep farm which he inherited with his brother aged 16. After completing his leaving certificate, he farmed for two years before going on to study at UCG. After graduating he leased out 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.

On the evening Michael will share with us his experiences of managing large infrastructure projects in different countries, the importance of a good team of people, his desire to return to farming again and the learnings and perspective he has brought from the 'Ward and Burke Group' to his farm business.

Paul Hyland

Michael Ward

Dairy Conference 2026 – Growing Profit from the Ground Up

Liz Duffy
IGA Council Member and Teagasc

At the heart of our dairy systems, grass is the foundation of a profitable, resilient, and sustainable business. That's why this year's Dairy Conference in the Charleville Park Hotel, Co. Cork on the 9 of January will be all about unlocking the full potential of your pastures to power productivity and profitability. Set your calendars for 9 January 2026, because our conference promises a schedule filled with practical insights, cutting-edge research, and inspiring stories. The focus? Simple, effective, and proven ways to get the best out of your pasture and boost your bottom line.

Join us for a day packed with farmer insights, research-backed strategies, and inspiring stories — all focused on making simple, grass-based systems work harder for your bottom line.

What's On the Agenda?

Session 1 – Industry Overview, Making the most of our strengths, What's ahead in 2026?

Session 2 – Growing 14 tonne of grass and how is this being consistently achieved?

Session 3 – Preparing for investment, financing opportunities and maintaining a robust and resilient system

Session 1: Keynote Speaker Dr Laurence Shalloo

Laurence Shalloo qualified from UCD with a BAgrSc 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 is currently head of the animal and grassland research and the innovation programme at Teagasc. Laurence kicks of the conference with a comprehensive look back at 2025—reviewing what the year taught us and identifying the key industry challenges we face in 2026. This session isn't just about reflection; it's about setting the stage for action. Laurence will discuss market trends, policy, financial and environmental factors that will shape the dairy landscape for 2026.

This session " Industry overview, making the most of our strengths, what's ahead in 2026?" is chaired by Aidan Brennan, Dairy Farmer and Dairy editor in the Irish Farmer's Journal. It promises to be a lively and engaging debate as we start out the new year.

Session 2: Keynote Speaker Dr Michael O'Donovan

Michael is head of the grassland science department at Teagasc, Moorepark. He graduated from UCD with a degree in Agricultural Science in 1995, after which he completed his masters in 1998 and a PhD in 2000. He leads a grassland research programme on innovating pasture-based dairy production systems, focusing on grazing management, incorporating clover into grazing systems, and oversees the Pasture Profit Index and PastureBase Ireland. Michael has over 25 years of experience in grassland research and has been instrumental in developing tools and technologies that enhance grass utilisation and profitability on Irish dairy farms. He coordinates the PastureBase Ireland programme, which underpins national efforts to improve grazing efficiency and herbage production. Widely published and an active collaborator across international grassland networks, Michael plays a key role in bridging scientific research and practical application for the benefit of farmers and industry. His work continues to shape Ireland's direction in pasture-based livestock systems.

John O'Loughlin, head of sustainability at Grassland Agro and IGA council member will chair this panel session, where he will be joined by dairy farmers, Kevin Moran and John MacNamara for a panel discussion where they will describe their high production grass systems where the target is to achieve up to 14 tonnes of grass grown. They will show that with the right strategies, tools, and mindset this target can be a reality.

Kevin Moran began farming in 2013 when he leased his uncle's 40 ha farm in Caherlistrane, Co. Galway milking 72 cows. Kevin is now farming 105 ha with 260 cows in a spring calving grass-based system. Kevin runs a simple system with two full-time labour units, with a clear focus on milk solids from grazed grass while maximising profit in both an environmental and economically sustainable manner. Kevin has placed a huge focus on improving and maintaining soil fertility on the farm over the last number of years, which has resulted in him growing 15 t DM/ha on average over the past 5 years, with 16 t DM/ha grown with 560 kg MS/cow in 2025. This has all occurred while reducing chemical fertiliser inputs to < 180 kg N/ha over the past 4 years, by incorporating white clover into the grazing swards on his farm. Clover not only offers environmental advantages to farmers, but also a financial return through increased animal performance and fertiliser savings.

John MacNamara alongside his wife, Olivia, farm in Knockainey Co. Limerick, with their four children, Caoimhe, Conor, Ailbhe and Padraic, who all contribute to the running of the farm. He is milking 220 spring calving dairy cows on a 76 ha milking platform with another 38 ha on the outside farm which is 6 miles from home for silage and heifers. John is also the chairman of Teagasc's Grass10 programme. John places a huge focus on grass production which has been achieved through excellent grassland management, maintaining optimal soil fertility, the incorporation of clover through consistent reseeding and over-sowing and aligning chemical nitrogen use. In 2025 the farm produced >15 t DM/ha, feeding less than 550 kg of concentrates per cow with 165 kg of chemical N/ha spread, all while maintaining production at over 520 kg of milk solids/cow, with the farm growing >14.8 t DM/ha of grass on average over the previous 5 years. John's aim is to run an enjoyable, profitable, efficient, sustainable dairy business, while also enjoying a good work-life balance.

Session 3: Keynote Speaker Donal Whelton

Donal Whelton is AIB Head of Agriculture, Food & Fishing. Originally from a dairy farm in Barryroe West Cork, Donal holds a BAgrSc degree from UCD and is a qualified financial advisor. Donal joined AIB in 2000, and began his career in the bank's commercial lending department before joining the AIB agri team in 2005. Having led the AIB southern agri team, Donal was appointed to his current position in 2021.

Donal will chair a panel discussion with three forward-thinking dairy farmers – David Fogarty, Katie O'Toole and Christopher Cahill who have built successful, profitable careers by embracing grass-based systems. This panel will answer pressing questions like: How do you build a solid business plan based on grass? What investment strategies can improve farm resilience? And how can you access funding to take your farm to the next level?

David Fogarty and Katie O'Toole operate a 500-cow jersey/friesian cross spring-calving dairy enterprise as part of a partnership on a fully leased farm near Kilkenny city. The aim is to build a system that prioritises simplicity, grass utilisation, and long-term business sustainability. Neither David nor Katie come from farms but both studied Ag Science at 3rd level and spent time farming in New Zealand. Katie completed her master's and worked with Teagasc for a period of time before opting to go farming full time. David managed farms after coming home from New Zealand and gained some very valuable experience. They set their sights on farming together and went about finding a suitable opportunity which took quite a while. Important factors were scale, existing infrastructure, business model, potential returns, location and the people they were going to be working alongside. Cantwellscourt ticked a lot of the boxes and they took over the running of the farm in August 2024. It has been a steep learning curve but also a very enjoyable experience so far, say Katie and David.

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.

Join us at the 2026 Dairy Conference & Social Night on January 8 and 9 at the Charleville Park Hotel, Co. Cork. It kicks off with the Gala Dinner and an engaging chat between Paul Hyland and Michael Ward, followed by a full day focused on maximising grassland productivity for profitable, sustainable dairy farming. Keynote speakers include industry leaders sharing cutting-edge research and practical strategies. Don't miss this prime event to connect, learn, and enhance your dairy business!

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

Strong turnout for IGA Beef Event on Meagher Family Farm in Co Tipperary

Niall Claffey
IGA council member and
Elanco Animal Health

On the evening of June 10, the Meagher family farm just outside Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, welcomed a 400-strong gathering of beef farmers and farming enthusiasts for the IGA beef event, which was kindly sponsored by FBD Insurance. The event offered an in-depth look at a highly efficient, grass-based store-to-beef system, highlighting sustainable management practices, careful animal selection, and the benefits of incorporating clover into grassland systems. Attendees left with practical insights into improving farm profitability.

The Meagher family farm, which spans 88 ha of grassland and 24 ha of tillage, has been in the family for generations. Tim Meagher, who now runs the operation alongside his wife Shauna and their four children, has transformed the farm into a model of modern Irish beef production. Over the years, he has focused on simplifying the enterprise, prioritising grass utilisation, and incorporating sustainable practices without compromising output or animal performance.

System Evolution

When Tim took over the reins of the family farm, the enterprise was more diversified. Suckler cow numbers stood at roughly 90, predominantly limousin, crossed with a charolais stock bull, while heifers were run with an angus bull. In addition, the farm maintained around 200 ewes and purchased weanlings from the west of Ireland to complement the homebred stock.

Over a decade ago, Tim decided to simplify the system, moving towards a traditional store-to-beef enterprise that maximises the use of grass in the diet. Today, the farm focuses on producing top-quality Irish beef with minimal reliance on purchased feed.

Stock Management and Grazing Practices

The farm currently carries 252 cattle — 160 bullocks and 92 heifers — all of which are slaughtered under 30 months of age. Cattle are purchased from marts in the west of Ireland, typically in September and October, weighing between 500 – 520 kg. They are finished over the following 10–12 months, with slaughter occurring from July to October, depending on when animals reach target weights and condition.

Attendees were particularly interested in the farm's rotational grazing system. The cattle are managed in large groups of 40 – 50 head, with 43 paddocks used to ensure grass is efficiently utilised and high-quality swards are maintained. Strip wires are employed to manage clean-outs effectively and optimise regrowth. Cattle are also grouped by age — January, February, March, and April-born calves — to streamline summer management and ensure uniform growth rates and to ensure all cattle are slaughtered under 30 months.

Feed and Nutrition Strategy

Tim's approach to feeding demonstrates a clear focus on maximising homegrown resources. The farm grows 24 ha of spring barley annually, which is fed to finishing cattle alongside soya hulls and minerals. Straw from the harvest is chopped and used as winter bedding.

A major highlight of the evening was Tim's discussion on silage management. High-quality silage is a cornerstone of the enterprise, with the goal of achieving dry matter digestibility (DMD) of 75% or higher. Meeting this target allows Tim to reduce or eliminate the need for winter meal. However, weather conditions in 2024 limited silage quality, with DMD values ranging from 68% to 73% across three cuts. The farm is producing 11 t DM/ha of grass and 89% of the cattle's diet is composed of grass.

The stocking rate on the farm is 2.27 livestock unit (LU)/ha.

"I like doing somewhere between 1 – 1.1 t of beef/ac. That's the old figure I'd rather go by," he said. "Every animal consumes roughly 2% of their bodyweight and if you can run it off that, that's more of a figure I like to go to."

Animal Health and Handling Facilities

Animal health featured prominently during the event. Tim highlighted the importance of proactive vaccination, dosing, and disease prevention to ensure all animals reach peak performance. The farm has invested in state-of-the-art handling facilities, enabling safe, efficient management of cattle while reducing stress. Visitors had the opportunity to inspect the facilities and discuss best practices for animal welfare and efficiency.

Sustainability and Environmental Practices

Sustainability and environmental stewardship are central to the Meagher farm system. Tim first introduced clover into the farm's swards in the early 2000's, and today both red and white clover play a pivotal role in silage production and grazing. This approach has significantly reduced the farm's reliance on chemical nitrogen, without affecting the kilograms of beef sold.

Tim stressed the importance of having an optimum soil pH for clover establishment and maintaining it in the sward. As a result, Tim maintains a pH north of 6.5.

In addition, the farm uses a slurry aeration system, which enhances nutrient efficiency and reduces emissions. Attendees were particularly interested in how these systems work in practice and the impact they have on grass growth and overall farm performance.

Event Highlights and Farmer Engagement

The IGA Beef Event provided attendees with a practical, hands-on look at a high-performing beef farm. Tim guided participants through the grazing paddocks, silage storage, and handling facilities, explaining the

reasoning behind key management decisions. The event also accommodated questions, allowing farmers to ask about everything from cattle purchasing strategies to finishing protocols and sustainable grassland management.

Key Takeaways for Farmers

Several key lessons emerged from the evening:

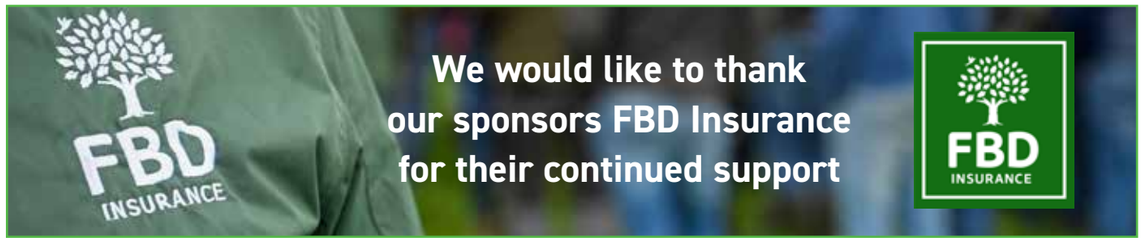
- *Grass is king*: Efficient use of grass is central to profitability in the store-to-beef system. Rotational grazing, paddock management, and age-grouping cattle allow for maximum utilisation.
- *Quality stock selection matters*: Tim's eye for selecting store cattle ensures uniform growth and finishing performance.
- *Homegrown feed reduces costs*: Growing barley and utilising straw reduces dependence on purchased meals.
- *Clover and sustainability*: Integrating clover improves silage quality, reduces chemical inputs, and supports sustainable grass growth.
- *Animal health and handling*: Investment in health protocols and handling infrastructure pays dividends in performance and welfare.

Conclusion

The IGA Beef Event on the Meagher family farm provided an excellent insight into how modern Irish beef farms can combine traditional practices with innovative, sustainable strategies. Farmers left with practical tips on everything from grazing management and feed efficiency to cattle selection and environmental stewardship.

Tim Meagher's approach demonstrates that a well-managed store-to-beef system, focused on grass and homegrown resources, can deliver high-quality Irish beef while remaining sustainable and economically viable. The event reinforced the value of knowledge-sharing and on-farm demonstrations in helping farmers improve performance and sustainability across the sector.

The success of the evening was a testament not only to the Meagher family's commitment to best practice but also to the ongoing importance of events like these in fostering a culture of learning and innovation in Irish agriculture. The IGA would like to thank FBD for its continued support of our annual beef event.



Finishing Lambs from Multispecies Swards in Co Sligo

Tom Coll
IGA Council Member and Teagasc

Large crowds travelled to the village of Skreen in west Sligo on Tuesday 8 July for this year's IGA Sheep Event, kindly sponsored by Mullinahone Co-op. The event was hosted by Philip and Jonathan Higgins, who farm 90 hectares in partnership. Over the past five years, the Higgins family have transitioned from a mixed sheep and suckler system to a combination of mid-season lambing ewes and a contract heifer-rearing enterprise, reflecting a clear focus on grass-based performance and efficient use of land and labour.

This year's event centred on the use of multispecies swards as a finishing crop for lambs, drawing particular interest given Jonathan's background in grassland research and the family's experience of integrating the crop into a productive commercial system.

A Complementary System

The Higgins farm runs two distinct but complementary enterprises. The sheep enterprise consists of 200 Texel × Mule and Suffolk × Mule ewes, joined to Texel, Suffolk, and Belclare rams, with Beltex rams used on ewe lambs. Around 50 replacement ewe lambs are bred annually. Lambing takes place from mid-March, with the ewes scanning at 1.9 and the ewe lambs at 1.4 lambs per ewe joined this year.

All lambs are finished on the farm and sold through the Sligo/Leitrim Lamb Producer Group to Irish Country Meats in Navan. Faecal sampling is used throughout the summer to determine when lambs require dosing, which has reduced the number of worm treatments needed each season.

Alongside the sheep flock, the Higgins family rear 340 pedigree Jersey heifers under contract. Each year, 170 weaned calves arrive in May and are returned to the dairy herd in-calf the following October. A heat-detection collar system helps ensure a compact breeding season, while a paddock system supports high grass intakes and efficient use of forage.

Both enterprises operate within a nutrient management plan. Protected urea is used as the nitrogen source, and slurry is applied through a low-emission system purchased under TAMS. This structured approach to nutrient use supports consistent grass production and environmental performance.

Multispecies Swards in Practice

Reducing concentrate input for finishing lambs has long been a goal on the Higgins farm. Drawing on the findings from his PhD research on multispecies swards at UCD Lyons Farm, Jonathan began implementing the practice at home in 2022 under the Department of Agriculture's multi-species sward measure.

That year, three hectares were reseeded in July with the Department-recommended mix, availing of the €300/ha payment. The sward was first grazed in early September and used to finish off the remaining lambs on the farm that season. Encouraged by its success, a similar area has been reseeded annually, with around 10 hectares now established in rotation.

The Higgins sow the crop each year as a dedicated finishing block for lambs. The 2025 reseed was carried out in late May using an Erth Agriseeder direct drill in a one-pass system. The field was sprayed with Roundup two weeks prior and grazed bare by heifers before sowing. The minimal-tillage approach helps with weed control, though Jonathan advises against reseeding fields with dock or thistle pressure, noting that these should be controlled the previous year.

This year's reseed was available for grazing seven weeks after establishment, reflecting both good establishment conditions and careful management. The block is divided into four sections using sheep wire and Clipex posts, allowing flexible subdivision for rotational grazing.

Grazing Management

The first grazing takes place when chicory reaches the seven-leaf stage, and the sward is grazed down to 5 cm. Initially, lambs graze the ryegrass first as they adjust to the new sward type, before beginning to eat herbs and clover.

Because the ryegrass can become stemmy by this point, topping is used selectively to maintain quality for subsequent grazings. Jonathan described grazing management as "a balancing act," where the goal is to maximise the longevity and productivity of the herbs while maintaining the grasses and clover for future years.

The multispecies block is stocked at around 50 lambs per hectare on the first rotation, with numbers reducing as drafts are made for slaughter. The system is designed to allow lambs to be finished entirely off grass. In most years, the majority of lambs receive no concentrate supplementation, with all lambs drafted for slaughter by mid-November.

Sward Evolution and Performance

The Higgins reseed 3-4 hectares of multispecies swards each year as part of an ongoing rotation. In the second year after establishment, the density of herbs such as chicory and plantain naturally declines, but the sward retains a strong clover and ryegrass component.

As Philip explained, "In year two the herb density decreases but depending on the time of year we still have herbs and clover in the sward and usually graze the ewe lambs rearing twins and ewes rearing triplets on these swards. In year three the herbs tend to be grazed out and you are left with a clover-ryegrass sward with occasional herbs."

This progression aligns with what Jonathan observed in his research - that multispecies swards evolve naturally into productive grass-clover systems over time, maintaining yield and forage quality while improving soil structure and biodiversity.

The system also fits well with the family's grazing strategy. Ewes and lambs can be used to graze out paddocks after the heifers, ensuring excellent grass utilisation and performance across both enterprises.

Weaning weights this year averaged 35 kg, allowing for a short finishing period on the multispecies block. Lambs are typically drafted for slaughter by mid-November, allowing the paddocks to be closed for winter and available for early spring grazing by the ewes.

Environmental and Economic Impact

The introduction of multispecies swards has helped the Higgins family reduce concentrate use without compromising performance. The integration of deeper-rooting species has supported soil health, extended the grazing season, and enhanced resilience in dry periods.

The contract heifer enterprise, meanwhile, provides a consistent income stream and complements the sheep system from a grassland-management perspective. Together, the two enterprises have created a balanced, sustainable farming model that maximises output from grass while maintaining soil fertility and environmental compliance.

Take-Home Messages

- Multispecies swards can be successfully incorporated into commercial sheep systems, provided grazing and reseeding are well planned.
- Rotational reseeding of 3-4 ha per year allows the system to evolve naturally, maintaining a balance between productivity and workload.
- Grazing management, particularly the timing of the first and second grazing, is critical in sustaining herb content and overall sward quality.
- Faecal egg counting, high-quality silage, and compact breeding management underpin the strong animal-health and performance results seen on the farm.

A Well-Attended and Engaging Event

The fine evening made for an enjoyable and informative event, with visitors treated to generous hospitality in the farmyard, where freshly grilled burgers and refreshments were served. Just five minutes from the Atlantic coast, the Higgins' picturesque farm offered sweeping views of the Ox and Dartry mountains, providing a memorable backdrop for discussion and learning.

The Higgins family were outstanding hosts. Philip and his wife Amanda, their son Jonathan and his wife Naomi, together with daughter Naomi, were exceptionally generous with their time and made everyone feel very welcome. Many attendees stayed on well after the formal proceedings for a chat in the yard, with Philip and Jonathan continuing to answer questions and share experiences long into the evening.

The Higgins farm proved a fitting venue for the IGA's summer event, combining technical insight with great hospitality, and served as a reminder of the openness and community spirit that defines both the IGA and its members.

North Cork Draws the Crowds for Dairy Summer Tour

John McCabe
IGA council member
and Teagasc

The 2025 Dairy Summer Tour was a prime example of the uniqueness that the Irish Grassland Association events have to offer its members. Large numbers of interested farmers, on buses, visiting two of the top grassland farmers in the country gaining insights into the long-term performance and decisions of high performing grassland farms while reconnecting with old acquaintances and fellow grassland enthusiasts.

This year's hosts, the Bermingham's and the Twomey's are dairy farming families that have built their systems around Ireland's competitive advantage – grazed grass. Over 600 people enjoyed the injection of positivity that Kevin Twomey brought as he gave his thoughts on young people getting started in dairying, and they witnessed a masterclass in dairy cow grazing from Mike Bermingham who, since he started dairying in 2014, has established himself as one of the best grassland managers on the globe.

The Twomey Farm

Kevin and Margaret Twomey bought the beautiful farm they live on in the Blackwater valley near Ballyhooly Co. Cork in 1992 with backing from the home farm where his parents and brothers were already farming. This was one of the key take aways from the day. Kevin's parents and brothers had no space for him so they made space – by using the home farm as the "mothership" whereby they secured finance and helped Kevin get going on his own farm. This was seen by those in attendance as a great solution for farms with more than one successor interested.

The size of Kevin and Margaret's business has grown at about 10% per year. The pain of this sort of growth was mentioned by Kevin – building up numbers and improving land, cost a lot in the expansion years but the money was always spent in high return areas. In quota times, it involved acquiring more quota. 2009 was mentioned as a significant time in their lives. The tough year taught them that they had built a very resilient system when they still turned a profit in one of the tightest years in memory. This strong business model gave them the confidence to start replicating what they were doing. In the run up to quotas going, the Twomey's leased a dairy farm and implemented the same system. They have since done this a number of times which requires lots of employed help.

The Twomey's are highly skilled in the area of employing staff and pulling strings to help the team work well together. Margaret Twomey spoke about her involvement in the business and the pivotal influence she plays, especially in the area of leadership. She places great thought into who works with who, into the social side of the house (a lot of their staff are from different parts of the country). All staff come together for get togethers – monthly on farm discussion/info sessions and social nights outs. WhatsApp groups are used to communicate effectively across the farms.

Both Kevin and Margaret are passionate about helping young people get started in dairying – from farm assistant roles to farm management and up to contract farming agreements – there is a rung on the ladder for everyone and what is common across every staff member is the opportunity to learn the practical skills required to run a grass based spring calving dairy system and if interested – the business element of running a dairy farm business.

Attendees heard from two young men that the Twomey's have helped get started. Erick Collins has just leased a dairy farm in Galway, having spent a few years with the Twomey's managing one of their farms. In his time with the Twomey's he gained three extremely useful things – cows (through leasing cows back to the Twomey's, and through youngstock), a track record for the banks (cow leasing business) and business acumen. Owen Ashton, has followed in similar suit but has stayed with the Twomey's – deciding to take on a contract farming arrangement and leasing cows. Owen runs one of the farms – receiving a management fee for his and all other labour required and he can do what he wishes with that fee. He also owns and leases a good proportion of the cows back to the business. There are tax benefits to him in terms of being self-employed, plus he has more autonomy over his day to day job. The crowd were very impressed with these forward-thinking young people as well as the Twomey's numerous actions for giving young people a start. It is no doubt that Kevin Twomey sparked a new conversation on generational renewal on the 23 July – can we do more for young, interested people? Is there space to let them start building equity in cow numbers for only a small cost to your business?

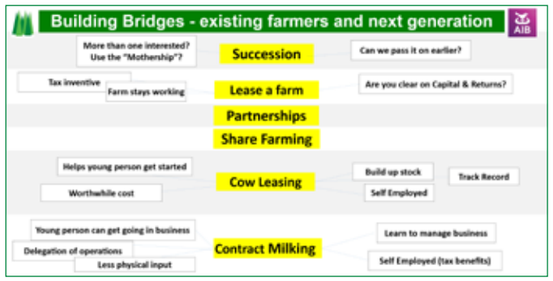


Figure 1. *One of the boards from the Twomey's session outlining some of the different ways to get started in dairying*

Twomey Family presentation

The home farm has 475 cows stocked at 2.8 LU/ha on the milking platform milked through a 50-point rotary and the farm has 500 cubicles. Overall stocking rate is around 2.24 LU/ha. The grass grown has decreased from roughly 14.5 t DM/ha to 12.5 t DM/ha in recent years – Kevin equates roughly half of this reduction to recurring soil moisture deficits and half to lower chemical nitrogen.

The genetics of the farm are impressive, with the herd being in the top 4% EBI nationally. Kevin says that they don't aim for the top 10% of performance on a per cow basis. The milk solids sold per cow was 439 kg in 2024, and the milk solids delivered for the whole farm was 952 kg/ha.

Costs were outlined on the day by Stuart Childs, Teagasc Dairy Specialist. He presented the impressive fact that the Twomey's operate at 3.3 c/l less cost than the national average even with full employed labour, plus the fact that there is less yield/cow to dilute the costs compared to the national average. Much of this is down to cost control, with some of the fixed costs down to the stage of development and size of the farm, but the majority of the cost control coming from the usage of inputs (strict grass-based model that has avoided outblocks and very high stocking rates on the milking platform). The scale was discussed but the conclusion was that even if Kevin and Margaret farmed 100 cows, they would still be low-cost operators due to their mindset and approach.

The IGA and all those who attended the event are indebted to the Twomey's for their hospitality. The visit was topped off by a tasty lunch where 600 people were fed in 22 minutes and dined at tables set up in sheds that the Twomey's had power-washed out for the occasion.

The Bermingham Farm

The afternoon session kicked off on the farm of Mike and Tina Bermingham which overlooks the Blackwater valley with stunning views of Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Kerry in the distance. The crowd were not only spoiled by the backdrop but by the highly efficient system of pasture based dairy production that is being employed on this farm outside Rathcormac, Co. Cork. This 90 cow herd is fully supporting the Bermingham family through top class use of Irelands competitive advantage – grazed grass, alongside high end management of cows and costs.

The IGA tour heard of Mike's farming journey from part-time farming alongside being a full-time construction foreman managing 30 people, to calving the Newford suckler herd and then to the farm entering milk production in 2014 as a new entrant. The sequence of investment stood out on the day – grazing infrastructure and essential yard infrastructure was done first. The yard was not over capitalised – no heifer shed existed until recently – Mike got the heifers contract reared instead of depreciating a shed at the start. Indeed, he employs this same technique to machinery, with a loader tractor, fertiliser spreader and quad being the main pieces of machinery. If mowing needs to be done – the contractor is used.

The farm KPI's speak for themselves. Mike managed his herd of 90 crossbred cows in 2024 in such a way that there was 539 kg of milk solids per cow sold to Dairygold coop after whole milk fed to calves, which would be another few kgs of solids. The herd has averaged over 540 kg of milk solids per cow over the last 8 lactations. With this coming from roughly 6,000 litres of milk at 4.98% butterfat and 3.94% protein. The herd is on track to sell over 6,250 litres in 2025, which will have implications for the farms nitrates banding. As we know, high milk production per cow is not everything; however, Mike's system is impressive on a per hectare basis, with 1,251 kg/ha of solids sold from the farm. Mike's Teagasc advisor Padraig McCormack, emphasised the fact that this performance is underpinned by a 85 – 90% 6-week calving rate and importantly – Mike's stockmanship in achieving low empty rates, low losses from lameness and mastitis allowing the herd to have a higher average of cows with three or more lactations which in tandem with Mike's ability to achieve high intakes of grass, drives high milk production.

The milking platform is stocked at 2.36 LU/ha, the whole farm is stocked at 2.52 LU/ha when heifers and silage ground is included. Grass growth has declined in recent years with the leading cause being soil moisture deficits. Annual tonnage averaged 11.5 t DM/ha for the years 2023 and 2024 and as a result, some silage has had to be bought in to sustain the stocking rate.

Mike fed less meal than the national average at 1.16 t/cow but still intends to get this down. Even though his meal feeding is lower than the national average, he delivered 118 kg of milk solids per cow more than the Dairygold average. The real story here is the grass. Mike manages to get his cows to eat 1,000 kg more grass and silage dry matter over national average herds.

The IGA would like to extend a word of thanks to John Maher of Teagasc's Grass10 campaign for helping Mike showcase his exceptional abilities around grassland management. Members were treated to a detailed session on how the day-to-day management is carried out. And the consensus from the crowd was that the day-to-day decisions set Mike apart from many. Mike and John unpacked many aspects – some key standout areas discussed on the day were:

- Mike's attention to detail
- Grass takes priority over other work
- Graze outs – if there is grass left, the cows are sent back after PM milking and moved before bedtime. Mike says that the cows do not expect to be moved if they see someone during the day. It is this attention to detail on residuals that sets Mike apart. The resulting re-growths are typically very high-quality leafy grass. A key point from the event was around the fact that plenty of farmers can achieve a very good graze out, and plenty can achieve a high intake per cow – but few can do both to the level that Mike can.
- Paddock sizes – all paddocks on the farm are big enough for 36-hour grazing's leading to large intakes of grass by all cows including first lactation cows.
- Reseeding – 10% per year (sometimes 15%) consistently (no year is skipped).
- Variety choice – Mike is gravitating towards Astonenergy in 2024 and 2025 for it's quality and grazeout, and because it pairs very well with clover. The farm has its fair share of Abergain which has worked really well for Mike. It has been highly productive but the use of Astonenergy in 2024 and 2025 is complimentary to the Abergain – giving Mike breathing space and helping him on his clover journey.
- Clover – From 2021 to 2023 Mike increased the percentage on his farm from 12% to 80%. This fell back to 62% in 2024 after a tough winter period for clover. He intends to continue with clover and capitalise on it when he can.
- Soil fertility – 900 tonnes of lime have been spread on the 40 ha milking platform since he started farming less than 15 years ago, with another 100 tonnes planned for autumn 2025.

Cost Control

Mike spoke about a ledger type system he uses in a business copy book for recording expenses each year, which he uses for cashflow budgeting and cost control. There is a video available on the IGA Youtube channel showing more detail on this if the reader is interested.

Summary

The 2025 Dairy Summer Tour will go down as a very memorable one with great farmers, long term success stories, fabulous examples of Irish landscapes, great food, good company and nice grass. These two data driven, grass based, profitable farms are excellent examples of sustainable dairy farms supporting livelihoods in rural Ireland. Thank you to the Twomey and Bermingham family for a brilliant day out!

Bermingham Family presentation

We would like to thank AIB for their continued support

AIB

Year in my Wellies

Sinéad Kearney
Teagasc Moorepark and
University College Dublin

Introduction

My name is Sinéad Kearney. I'm a third year PhD student based in Teagasc Moorepark and my research focuses on red clover agronomy and inclusion in perennial ryegrass silage swards. I also work as a relief milker.

Farming

I don't come from a farming background but help out on my uncle and cousins' dairy farm in Conna, Co. Cork. The farm consists of 350 acres, with 65% leased. It's a spring calving system with 238 cows and an overall stocking rate of 2.1 LU/ha. The home farm makes up the grazed portion of the milking platform and is stocked at 5.25 LU/ha, while outside blocks are used for zero-grazing, heifers and silage. As of the first week in October, cows are on 3 kg concentrates in the parlour and 16 kg of grass DM, with one load of zero-grazed grass fed each day after milking. Milk yield is holding at 16.5 litres, with solids at 5.41% fat and 4.25% protein. The drought hit the farm hard during the summer, and with grass growth restricted cows were buffer-fed a mix of grass silage, maize silage, and beet. Cows did well off this high-energy diet, and it gave grass a chance to recover when the rain finally came. 70 acres of silage was cut in the last week of September.

Red clover and maize

Red clover reseeds sown in late April established reasonably well given the dry conditions, though clover content is lower than expected. Weeds were controlled with DB plus, and two silage cuts were taken; 2,500 kg DM/ha for first cut and 3,500 kg DM/ha for second cut. After second cut, slurry was applied to lower clover content fields, with plans for a final zero-grazing cut later this year. In fields with higher clover content, no slurry was spread to avoid compaction damage and leave a lower cover over winter, with an early cut planned next Spring. The maize was harvested in the last week of September. Slurry was applied at a rate of 3,000 gallons/acre and a Westorwold was direct drilled into the maize stubble. The Westorwold will be zero grazed in 6 – 8 weeks, then cut for silage in late April before the next maize crop is sown.

Looking ahead to calving

Calving will start in the second week of January. The cows and heifers were scanned in September, with a 7% empty rate. We're expecting a busy spring, with 270 to calve and 85% due in the first 6 weeks.

PhD Research

I'm now in my third year of studies, based in Moorepark under the supervision of Dr. Michael Egan, in conjunction with UCD and Ass. Prof. Zoe McKay. This year I had great opportunities to share my work at various conferences and as part of the Moorepark open day. Most recently, I travelled to the UK to attend the European Grassland Federation symposium, where the focus was on multispecies swards. I presented findings from my work on red clover variety evaluation.

Red clover, when included in perennial ryegrass silage swards, can maintain herbage production under reduced N fertiliser application, due to its ability to fix over 200 kg N/ha/year through biological nitrogen fixation. This offers both environmental and economic benefits. However, persistence of red clover in silage swards is often limited to 3 – 4 years under intensive management. My research investigates the agronomic factors influencing herbage production and persistence in red clover perennial ryegrass silage swards, with the goal of optimising their performance in Irish conditions. As part of my research, I manage four trials.

Variety selection and nitrogen rate

This trial evaluates the performance of eight red clover varieties under three nitrogen rates (0, 75 and 150 kg N/ha), with plots located in both Moorepark (Co. Cork) and Teagasc Grange (Co. Meath) to account for location effects. Sown in 2022, the plots are cut three times per year to stimulate a silage system. Now at the end of its third year, the trial has shown clear differences in yield and clover content across the different varieties and nitrogen rates. The top performing varieties (Aberclaret and Fearga) bred in Ireland and the UK for increased persistence continue to out yield all other varieties and maintain much higher clover content.

Establishment and seeding rate

This trial investigates the impact of seeding rate and variety selection on establishment, herbage production and nitrogen fixation. Plots were sown in Moorepark in April and have been monitored closely across establishment. Measurements include red clover root and shoot development, onset and extent of nitrogen fixation, herbage yield, clover content and nutritive value.

Cut height

One year of data has now been collected for this trial investigating the effect of cutting height on red clover growth and persistence. Plots in Clonakilty Agricultural College were cut 4 times for silage at heights of 4, 6, 8 or 10 cm. Measurements include height of the red clover growing point, leaf, stem and dead material in the sward, light penetration to the base of the sward, herbage yield, clover content and nutritive value. This is a split block experimental design. For a simulated grazing cut at the end of the year, half the plots remain at their designated cut height while all of the others are cut to 4 cm to simulate a grazing height. This will allow us to investigate how management practices impact red clover survival and regrowth and help identify the optimum cut height.

Ensilability and fermentation

Now in its second year, this trial evaluates how different red clover varieties affect silage fermentation and ensilability. Silage is harvested from plots, wilted and compacted into ensilability chambers for 35 days. Samples are then tested for nutritive value, fermentation and ensilability characteristics.

Key findings

While this research is still ongoing, findings to date highlight the importance of red clover variety selection for improved yield and persistence. In year three of evaluation, top-performing varieties produced 3,000 kg DM/ha more than other varieties and maintained a higher clover content of 55%. The research also shows that nitrogen application increases total herbage production but reduces clover content in the sward. Most of the yield benefit comes from nitrogen applied for the first cut, with no additional annual yield gained from a higher rate of nitrogen compared to a moderate rate.

Year in my Wellies

Cian Minogue
smaXtec and formerly UCD Lyons Farm, University College Dublin

Introduction

My name is Cian Minogue, from Tuamgraney, Co. Clare. I am a Dairy Cow Health & Feeding Consultant with smaXtec for Ireland and the UK. Also, I am a final year PhD student at UCD Lyons Farm, investigating the effect of including plantain (*Plantago lanceolata* L.) in perennial ryegrass-white forage mixtures on dairy cow performance. I recently submitted my PhD thesis for examination and will have my thesis defence later this year. Finally, I help my father, Pat, operate our continental suckler cow herd and play hurling with Bodyke GAA Club.

smaXtec

This summer, I began working with smaXtec as a Dairy Cow Health & Feeding Consultant for Ireland and the UK. Simply, smaXtec is a company that offers a health management system for large ruminants, predominantly dairy cows. Cows are administered a bolus that resides in their reticulum, monitoring inner body temperature, rumination, and animal activity. Using this data, farmers can receive notifications for heat detection, calving alerts, mastitis, ketosis, milk fever, and water intake. Measuring the inner body temperature of cows 24/7 allows us to detect any issues, such as mastitis, up to 72 hours before it manifests into a clinical case. An additional feature is a bolus, which can measure reticulorumen pH, which can help us improve feeding management, milk production, and cow health. Since I began last July, I have travelled twice to their headquarters in Austria, but also to Germany in late September. In Germany, a group of us travelled to several farms, one of which included 3,500 cows. It was a valuable experience to observe and learn from the contrasts in milk production systems between Ireland and central Europe. Ireland's milk production system from grazed grass is unique, and it's only through my travels over the past 18 months that I've come to recognise and appreciate its distinctiveness. This coming November, I will be travelling to the Netherlands with other colleagues from Europe, where we will be participating in the CowSignals Masters training course for a week. This is a great opportunity for us, provided by smaXtec, as we aim to further improve our advisory service to farmers.

My work week varies, but typically consists of meetings with our Irish team and farm visits (with lots of tea and coffee). I enjoy going to farms and meeting with farmers and their families; they're all very welcoming. We have a great, supportive team here in Ireland, and I look forward to seeing what we can achieve.

PhD

I began my PhD journey in January 2022 under the supervision of Ass. Prof. Zoe McKay and Prof. Tommy Boland, as part of the PASTURE-NUE project, in which Dr. Michael Dineen of Teagasc is the principal investigator. To recap, it involved investigating the effect of offering lactating dairy cows plantain in a perennial ryegrass-white forage on dry matter intake, milk production, rumen fermentation, enteric methane emissions, and nitrogen excretion. As mentioned, I am nearing the end of it, but it is something that I (can now say) am delighted I undertook. My advice to anyone considering doing a PhD is to chat to someone who is or has completed a PhD, as it is a big undertaking that requires a lot of time and personal sacrifice.

As part of my research, we conducted two research trials with lactating dairy cows in 2022 and 2023. This work has resulted in the publication of three research papers to date and a fourth, which is currently under review with a journal. To briefly summarise some of our key findings, offering lactating dairy cows plantain in a perennial ryegrass-white clover forage reduced milk fat yield in early lactation (spring). However, cows offered the perennial ryegrass-white clover-plantain forage in late lactation (autumn) had a greater dry matter intake, daily milk yield, and a greater content of health-beneficial polyunsaturated fatty acids in milk fat. Furthermore, cows offered the perennial ryegrass-white clover-plantain forage had a lower urine nitrogen concentration and enteric methane emissions. These results are promising for the development of sustainable pasture-based milk production systems, but the continued persistence of plantain in intensively grazed pastures remains a challenge going forward and requires further research.

In September, I was fortunate to present some of my PhD research results at the European Grassland Federation symposium in Reading, UK. This was a fantastic symposium that focused on multispecies swards. Also, our study, which examined the effect of plantain on enteric methane emissions of lactating dairy cows, will be presented at the International Greenhouse Gas & Animal Agriculture Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, in early October.

Home farm

As mentioned in my previous article, we run a 50-cow suckler herd that is split evenly between spring and autumn calving, which uses 100% AI. We were fortunate this summer that we experienced ideal grass growing conditions and made some great quality silage, with any third cuts completed by early August. When the weather allows, we aim to cut, ted, rake, and bale the silage within a 24 to 36-hour period. Recently, our autumn calving herd began calving, and five cows have calved so far – all ok. The recent wet weather has necessitated that freshly calved cows and calves be housed indoors at night. We are hopeful that the weather will improve, as we still have an abundant supply of grass to graze. Cows have access to a pre-calving mineral bucket and will receive a trace mineral bolus in the coming weeks. The spring calving cows with calves at foot are being strip grazed and offered fresh grass every 24 to 48 hours and have access to a magnesium mineral bucket to reduce any issues with hypomagnesemia/grass tetany. The spring-born calves have access to a mobile creep feeder where they are being offered a 16% crude protein weanling ration from Roches Feeds. We are participants of the Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme (SCEP) and will weigh the remaining calves in the coming weeks. Finally, we recently sold some of our weanlings in early September at our local weanling show and sale in Scariff. Our bull weanlings weighed from 375 to 525 kg, and our heifers averaged 338 kg, with one of them receiving a first-place rosette. Overall, there was a great show of weanlings, which is a testament to all the farmers, and there was a great trade – long may it last.

The Cost of Poor Soil Fertility

John O'Loughlin
IGA council member and
Grassland Agro

When you visit the IGA website, the preamble states in part: ***"Ireland's leading voluntary forum for discussing the science of grass and animal production, and the economics and finances of dairy, beef cattle and sheep production systems."***

For this article, I have chosen to explore the euro value of a tonne of dry matter (DM) per hectare in a dairy enterprise.

Back in 2017, Clare man and dairy farmer Liam Hanrahan published findings from his PhD which showed that utilising an additional tonne of DM per hectare was worth €173 in net profit. The work was carried out under the guidance of another Clare man, Prof. Laurence Shalloo. Huge amounts of farm data were analysed by Liam and Laurence, and to me, their research provided one of the key insights, that one figure, helping farmers understand the real benefits of excellence in grassland management and production. After completing his PhD, Liam returned home to the family farm and will no doubt continue to have a big influence on the Irish dairy industry in the years ahead.

Delving into how that €173 per tonne figure was reached, it's clear that it was based on output and input prices, both of which have seen significant inflation since 2017. Like how the Economic Breeding Index (EBI) was updated recently, I believe we've reached a point where this figure also needs revision. The last interim update in 2022 (the outlier) valued that same tonne of DM at €500 based on 2022 input and output prices.

When researching this article, I quickly realised the magnitude of the task in updating the figure myself and without access to the necessary data and know-how. I reached out to Laurence Shalloo, who commented: *"It's likely to be between the two; you will find out at the IGA Dairy Conference 2026."* That was enough for me, the experts are on the case. Perhaps they might surprise us with a grass clover figure too. Even so, the takeaway is clear: the value of grass has increased significantly. Our only real competitive advantage in Irish dairying is grass, so in advance of the exact figure, lets focus on growing and grazing as much high-quality forage as possible.

Out in the field, away from the spreadsheets, the proof is plain to see. My IGA colleagues Mike Bermingham and John McCabe highlighted this perfectly at this year's Dairy Summer Tour. Mike's success — 540 kg of milk solids per cow — was achieved not through concentrates, but through grass. His cows were consuming 2 kg DM per day more of quality grass than the national average cow.

As part of the Grass10 series of walks, I began to think about how best to communicate the message on soil fertility. I created a board titled *"The Cost of Poor Soil Fertility"* — a simple but powerful way to connect soil health to profitability. Based on what I've seen and discussed, I've been speculating that the true value today might sit somewhere around €350 per tonne of DM. Sometimes the debate gets stuck on whether we should be feeding a half tonne or a tonne of concentrate when the reality is the more grass we utilize the more profit there will be in the business. Now lets focus on doing that and not worrying about the level of feed in the system.

Getting back to the task at hand, growing and grazing as much forage as possible. The connection between soil fertility and profitability becomes obvious. Suboptimal soil fertility reduces grass growth, and reduced grass growth reduces profit.

Research from David Corbett (another Clare man) and David Wall and the team at Teagasc Johnstown Castle shows that:

- Suboptimal pH reduces grass growth by 1.5 t DM/ha.
- Suboptimal phosphorus (P) reduces growth by 1.5 t DM/ha.
- Suboptimal potassium (K) reduces growth by 1.5 t DM/ha.

Nationally, dairy farm soil fertility statistics are as follows (Teagasc Soil Fertility Report, 2024):

- 39% have suboptimal pH
- 37% have suboptimal P
- 38% have suboptimal K

That adds up to 114%, meaning many soils are deficient in more than one nutrient. Excellent grassland managers typically achieve 80% utilisation of the grass they grow, but the effects of poor fertility are compounding. For example, if a farm is suboptimal for both pH and P, grass growth can be reduced by 3 t DM/ha.

Example: The Cost of Poor Soil Fertility

Here's a simple example based on the national average dairy farm of 44 ha (National Farm Survey), using national soil fertility data (Teagasc Soil Fertility Report, 2024). You can use the same approach to calculate the impact on your own farm or the figures are available on the first page of your Nutrient Management Plan (NMP).

	Farm Size (ha)	% Sub pH	Area Sub pH (A)	% Sub P	Area Sub P (B)	% Sub K	Area Sub K (C)	Ha Suboptimal (A+B+C)
Nation Avg	44	39	17.16	37	14.06	38	16.72	**47.94**
Your Farm								

Now, let's look at the cost of poor soil fertility, assuming a yield penalty of 1.5 t DM/ha, 80% utilisation, and a value of €350 per tonne of DM.

	National Avg	My Farm
Area Suboptimal (A+B+C)	47.94	
Soil Fertility Yield Penalty	× *1.5 t DM/ha*	× *1.5 t DM/ha*
Tonnes DM Lost	**71.9 t**	
80% Utilisation	× *0.8*	× *0.8*
Tonnes DM Lost (Adjusted)	**57.5 t**	
Value per Tonne DM	*€350*	*€350*
Cost of Poor Soil Fertility (€)	**€20,125**	

The Message

When you put the numbers on it, the message becomes hard to ignore. Poor soil fertility is costing the average Irish dairy farm over €20,000 a year — all through reduced grass growth, subsequently lower utilization and reduced milk solids from forage.

Grass is our greatest asset and our key competitive advantage. The challenge for us all is to continue growing, managing, and utilising every extra tonne of quality forage we can produce.

"It pays to feed" – I've heard it 100 times this year. I agree. It pays to feed high quality grass/grass white clover. It pays to feed your soil.

Thanks to Laurence for his support on this article and I look forward to his presentation at the IGA dairy conference where we will explore this topic in more detail.

Stay a Step Ahead of Liver Fluke

Brian McConnell
BVSc MRCVS
Elanco Animal Health

Over the years, parasite management remains a challenging area with the development of anthelmintic resistance as well as changing weather patterns influencing parasite lifecycles.

Let's take a closer look at one parasite in particular – liver fluke. This parasite's presence is often associated with wetter climates, making it a parasite of great significance for most of Ireland.

Liver fluke is a parasite of grazing livestock which affects the liver and its bile ducts; it's fairly non-selective when it comes to picking its host and can pretty much infect any animal with a liver.

Liver with adult fluke

The lifecycle is both complex and fascinating, which relies on the mud snail for its completion. Given mud snails are found on wetter ground, this is one of the reasons liver flukes prevalence is greater in such areas. Temperature also plays a part in the lifecycle as both fluke egg hatching and mud snail activity rely on temperatures above 10°C.

We can use this knowledge to our advantage in two ways:

1) By trying to minimise snail habitats through maintaining effective drainage, fixing leaky troughs, and minimising poached areas and tracks caused by vehicles.
2) By trying to avoid grazing areas of snail habitat once fluke larvae (metacercariae) start to appear on pasture – this may involve electric fencing around wet or boggy areas or moving animals to lower risk grazing or housing.

Mud snails, vital in the liver fluke lifecycle

Elements of the above options may seem unfeasible on some farms, but remember, the best way to control the fluke risk on your farm is to make every attempt to avoid infection in the first place.

In relation to my second point above, how do we know when fluke larvae (metacercariae) appear on pasture? As this process is heavily influenced by the weather, timings can vary greatly year to year. We can make some predictions based off the weather throughout the summer. However, the best way to evaluate risk on your farm, as well as the need to treat, is to perform diagnostic testing.

Testing – look for fluke!

At this point, it is a good idea to get your vet or advisor involved in creating a testing protocol. There are several methods of diagnosis, however, choosing the correct test is crucial. Some tests can detect earlier stages of liver fluke and others are limited to detecting later stages. The table below details why each test is useful and when might be the best time to use them.

Test	Why use this test?	When to use this test?
Antibody test (blood sample)	Livestock will develop antibodies to liver fluke within a few weeks of being infected for the first time. Although these antibodies give no protection to the animal, we can use them to show that an animal has been infected. This test will not quantify the liver fluke burden, but instead tells us whether or not the animal has met a fluke.	As this test detects liver fluke early after infection, it is best used at the beginning of the fluke season to detect when the infectious stages (metacercariae) are starting to appear, and therefore the risk of infection is starting. However, as the antibodies can last for months, including from the previous fluke season and after an animal has been treated, the test should be targeted at first grazing season animals (lambs are easiest), grazing known fluke risk areas.
Coproantigen test (dung sample)	This will give us an indication of how many animals in the group might be infected, as well as the level of infection in the individual animal. In field situations it can detect fluke from around 7 – 6 weeks after infection, with an increasing 'score' as the number and size of fluke present increase. Coproantigen levels drop off quickly once the liver fluke are removed, so a positive result means there is active infection.	This test can be used as routine sampling, at any time during the season, preferably after a positive antibody (blood) test has shown the fluke challenge has started. Ideally 10 samples should be collected from the group and tested (pooling samples for coproantigen testing can give misleading results).
Fluke egg count (dung sample)	This test can only detect the presence of egg-laying adult fluke. These will already have been present in the liver for 12 – 10 weeks before they mature and start producing eggs. Although the fluke will produce thousands of eggs, they are released from the gall bladder into the gut intermittently, so not every faeces sample from the infected animal will have eggs in it. As the eggs are held in the gall bladder, they can continue to be found in dung samples for up to three weeks after the fluke has been removed.	Best used as a pooled test, where multiple samples from a group are mixed together and analysed once, but not in the early part of the fluke season as it can only detect the presence of adult, egg-laying fluke. A negative result does not mean there are no fluke present, just that there are no adult fluke present. This test is convenient given a dung sample is all that's needed, but it does rely on a lab technician correctly identifying liver fluke eggs. Rumen fluke eggs are very similar to liver fluke eggs and both types of eggs can be easily confused with each other.
Fallen stock/ abattoir reports	Never waste a dead animal! Even if you are certain the animal died for another reason, it is worth checking the condition of the liver to see if there is any damage or liver fluke present. This is especially important in the early autumn. If you are sending cattle or sheep direct to slaughter, any livers condemned – and the reason they were condemned – will be detailed on the kill sheet.	We should use this test every time!

How does liver fluke impact an animal?

Disease can present in an acute, sub-acute or chronic form. The number or length of time over which fluke cysts are ingested will dictate which form presents.

Affected animals will often present with anaemia (pale membranes). Acute cases are often found dead and chronic cases can experience loss of condition, production losses and possibly bottle-jaw. The acute form is more of a problem in sheep than cattle, but the chronic form is common in both species.

Very low numbers of fluke in the liver may cause no obvious clinical signs but will still have a significant impact on productivity (growth rate, milk yield etc).

Treatment

Stages of liver fluke are categorised as either:

1) Early immature (baby fluke)
2) Immature (teenage fluke)
3) Adult

There are a number of different flukicides available on the market, targeting different stages of liver fluke. Oral products containing the active ingredient, triclabendazole, have the potential to kill the widest range of fluke stages – with oral solutions killing down to two-week-old fluke in cattle and two-day-old fluke in sheep; this differs to pour-ons containing triclabendazole killing down to 6–8-week-old fluke. However, it is important to bear in mind that triclabendazole resistant fluke have been widely reported in Ireland. There are many other options available when it comes to killing immature and adult fluke – this should be discussed with your vet or advisor in order to target treatment towards the stage of liver fluke present.

It is vital to use the right active, at the right time!

With changes to the climate, and the liver fluke lifecycle so heavily influenced by weather, we can consider the timings of liver fluke activity more difficult to predict than in the past. Therefore, monitoring via diagnostic testing and ensuring selection of the most appropriate product is of paramount importance.

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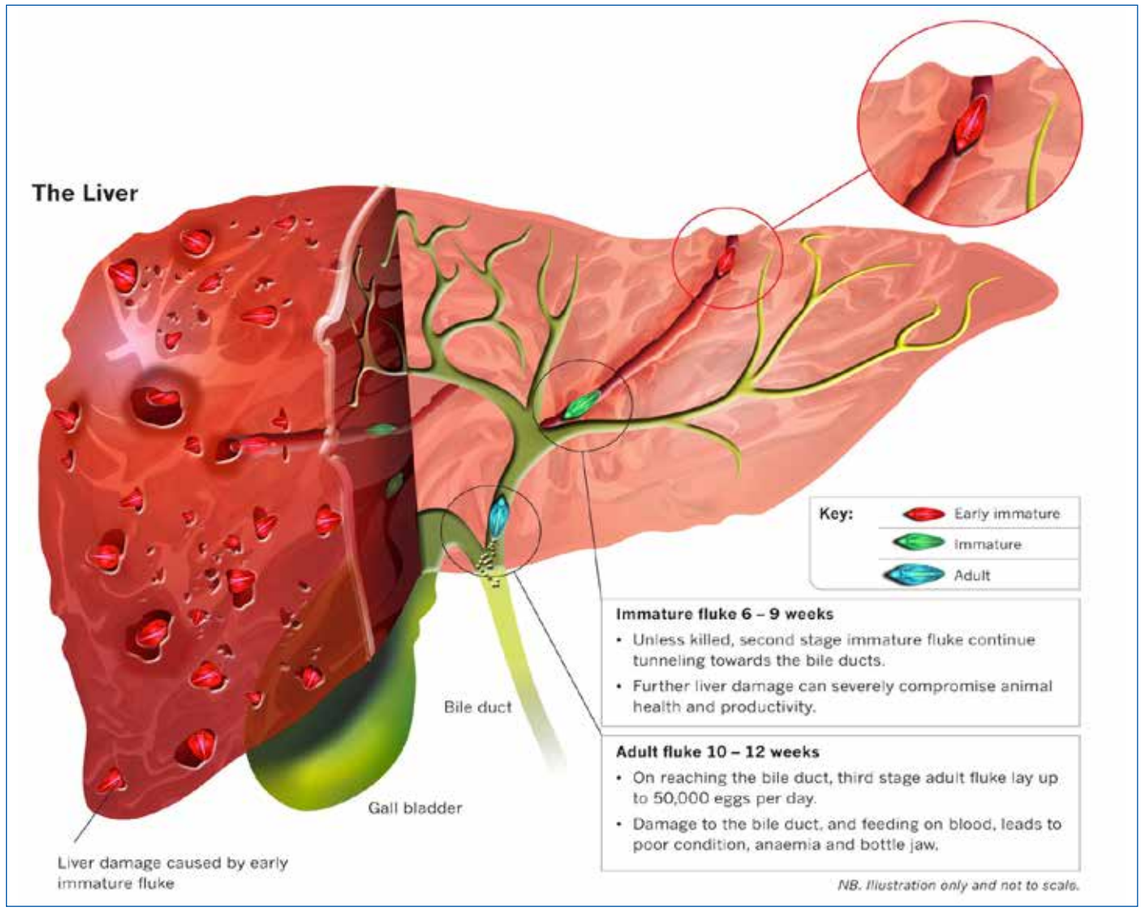

Grass and Clover Breeding for Grassland of the Future

Patrick Cashman
Goldcrop and Pasture Innovations

Why Forage Breeding?

Grasses and clovers have evolved and changed over thousands of years, adapting to changing climate and environmental stresses. Natural selection ensures 'survival of the fittest', with evolving grasses and clovers persistent in extensive pasture systems. Forage breeding seeks to identify and inter-cross the 'best of the best' for traits of agricultural and environmental significance in grassland systems of the future. Not only will these genetic improvements improve economic resilience of grass-based systems but also bring benefits to wider society. Breeders can improve variety traits that will be required to keep grassland swards competitive over the next 20 to 30 years. The most current example is various limits being imposed on the usage of chemical N, which is essential to maintaining herbage yield. Breeding work started 15 – 20 years ago on making white clover varieties more resilient and productive will return economic and environmental benefits to Irish grassland farmers over the next 10 years and more as new white clover varieties are adapted on farm.

Pasture Innovations

For a breeder to make significant improvements in any species, they must identify superior genetics for traits of importance expressed in the intended end use environment. Major environmental factors include climate and farming system. This creates a challenge for Ireland's temperate grassland grazing systems as they differ significantly to those in continental Europe. European weather is often much warmer in summer, and silage cutting is the primary use for grassland.

Pasture Innovations is a grassland variety development partnership between Teagasc and the seed company Goldcrop. Forage breeding activities are carried out by Teagasc at OakPark. Goldcrop is responsible for seed production, marketing and seed distribution. All activities within Pasture Innovations are synergistic, ensuring the best outcome for the grassland farmers of Ireland. A multispecies breeding strategy targeted at increasing animal production potential, improving animal health and welfare, and reducing the environmental and climatic footprint from agriculture.

Breeding Process

While animal breeding in Ireland uses the national herd/flock to breed the next generation, the grassland breeding process differs significantly. Variety development occurs within a controlled environment. Perennial ryegrass is pollenated by wind, while clovers are pollinated by insects. Control measures are critical

to ensure only planned crossing occurs. Grassland species are outcrossed species meaning that continued crossing within a narrow elite pool causes seed infertility, thus variation must be maintained in the finished variety. Several hundred potential parent lines are evaluated annually, under management replication on farm practice, to create sufficient selection pressure. The breeding process can be varied depending on breeder. The following is an outline of a traditional breeding system for forage species:

Year 1: Elite plants for traits of interest are identified

Year 2: Two plants are cross pollinated, seed harvested

Year 3: Resulting seed is sown, cross pollinated and harvested to increase available seed

Year 4: Harvested seed sown in evaluation mini swards to be measured for traits of importance

Year 5 and 6: Plots are measured for at least two production years after sowing

Year 7: Elite populations for traits of importance are inter-crossed

Year 8: Harvested seed is again grown and inter-crossed – resulting seed is a new variety to be entered into official evaluation.

Independent Variety Evaluation

For a newly bred variety to be legally sold in Europe, it must undergo two separate testing regimes. Distinctness, uniformity and stability and value for cultivation and use. Both tests run in tandem, with the entire process taking five years after the completion of breeding. Only the best varieties are entered into independent variety testing by breeders. Even so, only 20% of all entries are typically added to a recommended list. This ensures a very high level of agronomic performance for varieties that appear on the recommended list.

Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS)

This test ensures that a new variety is distinct from all previously registered varieties, uniform within variety and stable across years. This protects breeders' intellectual property, ensuring an economic return through seed sales for the breeders that invested in producing an improved variety. Thus, giving confidence to investment in future breeding. All plants within a forage variety are genetically unique from each other and the uniformity tests ensures that each new variety's population falls within a required range.

Value for Cultivation and Use (VCU)

This is the collection of agronomic data on new varieties to determine if a new variety is a clear improvement over what is currently available. In Ireland, this task is conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). DAFM sow each new variety twice, harvesting them across 4 production years. All varieties are subjected to frequent cutting which simulates grazing and a silage system. Varieties are sown across 5 sites in Ireland to ensure a variety is adaptable to a range of Irish conditions. Data is processed by Teagasc, using the Pasture Profit Index economic model. Results are freely available to industry to inform varieties choice for farm use.

Additional grazing evaluation is conducted by Teagasc Moorepark. All varieties are sown in a chess board arrangement. Cows are allowed to freely graze between varieties to determine suitability to grazing. This is presented as a star rating in recent years, with the representation moving to a euro value in 2026. While this new economic value will provide a useful variety ranking based on the grass value harvested or wasted. Farmers will need to interpret the cost of poor graze out on animal performance and their grazing system.

Commercial Seed Production

Upon positive independent results for a new variety, sufficient seed must be produced to allow commercial sale. This will take a minimum three years to produce a commercial quantity of seed. Government issued seed certification at each stage ensures germination and purity.

Traits of Importance and Variety Performance

Within Pasture Innovations, most resources are committed to the improvement of perennial ryegrass, as it is the main forage species sown in Ireland. The traditional traits for improvement (e.g. yield, nutritional value, persistency and disease resistance) that were important 20 years ago are still relevant today. However, the programme continues to evolve and introduce new traits. Teagasc is the first breeding programme to select for residual grazed height or grazing utilisation. Grazing utilisation is a function of multiple components including sward architecture, quality, palatability and disease resistance. Advancements are evident in the new late diploid perennial ryegrass varieties, named Clonakilty and Bandon (Table 1).

Table 1. Clonakilty and Bandon perennial ryegrass varieties and comparable late diploid varieties on the 2025 Ireland PPI

Variety	Total €	Spring€	Summer€	Autumn€	Quality€	Silage€	Breeder
Clonakilty	**200**	**63**	**56**	**52**	**-5**	**33**	**Teagasc**
Bandon	**196**	**32**	**65**	**47**	**30**	**23**	**Teagasc**
Aberbann	169	-4	77	64	-25	56	
Ballyvoy	157	55	38	34	19	11	
Bowie	150	4	47	41	29	29	

White clover

The Pasture Innovation white clover breeding programme is arguably the strongest in north-western Europe supplying the majority of new varieties to the Ireland and UK recommended lists over the last decade.

Two new white clover varieties, named Clodagh and Dungloe, were released in 2025. Clodagh and Dungloe represent a new standard in white clover. Clodagh and Dungloe are the highest yielding large and medium leaf size varieties on the Ireland recommended list, respectively (Table 2). The varieties are recommended for use in Ireland, France, England, Wales and Scotland demonstrating their broad adaptation, resilience and persistency across a wide range of environments and farm systems.

Table 2. Clodagh and Dungloe white clover varieties and comparable varieties on the 2025 Ireland recommended list

Variety	Leaf size	Total yield grass + clover	% White clover	Breeder
Clodagh	**Large**	**108**	**50**	**Teagasc**
Dublin	Large	102	49	Teagasc
Violin	Large	101	46	
Dungloe	**Medium**	**103**	**50**	**Teagasc**
Chieftain	Medium	97	45	Teagasc
Aberswan	Medium	94	49	

Summary

- Grass and Clover breeding ensures grassland swards will remain adapted to meet future system requirements, maintaining animal performance from grazed forage, while reducing environmental impacts, all in a changing climate
- Independent testing of new varieties including both VCU and DUS ensures new varieties recommended for use are of a very high standard across a range of Irish conditions
- The entire process from breeding, independent evaluation, seed production and sowing of new varieties on commercial farms takes 15 to 20 years. Breeding work today continues to ensure varieties are available to meet the demands of grassland swards for the next 20 to 30 years.

Reflections on My Year as President of the Irish Grassland Association

John Farrell
IGA council member
and AIB

I was honored to become President of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) in September 2024. I'd like to thank Bryan Hynes for inviting me to be his vice-president. Serving as President of the IGA during the 2024/2025 term has been a deeply rewarding experience.

I come from a farming family in Co. Wicklow, where I work alongside my father and uncle. We run a suckler to store system and mid-season sheep flock. After studying agriculture at UCD, I joined the AIB agri team, where I continue to work.

As someone working in the industry and actively involved in beef and sheep farming in Wicklow, it was a privilege to lead the IGA over the past 12 months working with the Council and Maura to advance our mission. Before joining the Council in 2021, I collaborated with the IGA for several years through my role in AIB, which sponsors the IGA Dairy Summer Tour. Over the years, I have worked closely with Maura, past presidents and organising committees to support this event.

Fortunately, my presidency coincided with a good year for the agri sector. Grass growth and weather were favourable (for the most part) and prices rose across most sectors, and reaching record highs in some. Let's hope for a repeat of the same in 2026!

Highlights of the Year

The objective of the IGA is to advance knowledge and share best practice in good grassland management across Irish grass-based dairy, beef and sheep producers. We achieve this largely through our programme of farm walks, conferences and communications such as our bi-annual newsletter. Our farm walks and conferences include our Beef Event (June), Sheep Event (July), Dairy Summer Tour (July), our Autumn event (November) and our Dairy conference in January, with the finishing touches being put in place for what promises to be another excellent conference in 2026.

We are fortunate that many of the most technically efficient and progressive farmers open their gates to us each year. They generously share their experiences and insights with attendees, helping to highlight what is driving production, performance and profitability on their farms. This year was certainly no exception. A warm thank you goes to all our 2025 host farmers – Tim Meagher and family in Tipperary; Philip & Jonathan Higgins and families in Sligo; Mike and Tina Bermingham; and Kevin and Margaret Twomey in Cork. Their time, hospitality and commitment are vital in delivering these valuable events.

In addition, we host a number of conferences during the year which bring together recognised experts from across the sector to present research, discuss topical issues, and explore the economics of best practice for dairy, beef and sheep farmers. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to and supported our conferences throughout the year. Your involvement and commitment are greatly appreciated.

We are fortunate in the IGA to have an excellent council in place, that includes some of the most progressive agri-business personnel, agricultural scientists, consultants and highly efficient beef, sheep and dairy farm producers. They are the driving force behind all that we do and ultimately develop and deliver the events for our members.

Navigating the evolving landscape of Irish agriculture

We are extremely fortunate here in Ireland that our climate facilitates us to grow grass like few other countries in the world. We can produce high quality products, which are more sustainable at a lower cost.

As a small country in the global marketplace, we have established a significant footprint for ourselves. In 2024, our food and drink exports grew once again, reaching €17 billion, with Irish produce now exported to 180 countries worldwide. We're widely recognised as a high-quality, safe, traceable and sustainable food producer – a reputation that gives us a strong foundation for the future.

The key opportunities for Irish farmers will remain around keeping production costs low, leveraging our sustainability credentials and assessing premium markets that reward high value produce. There is no doubt that costs have trended upwards on farm in recent years. While much of these increases are outside of the control of farmers, we must continue to make sure we maximise grazed grass in the diet – the cheapest feed source available to us.

Maximising grass utilisation is the most effective way to maintain a low-cost production system, ensuring resilience in the face of global market pressures. Grass based production not only keeps costs down but also enhances the sustainability story of Irish agriculture, which is the envy of many countries around the world. By maintaining this positive sustainability trajectory, we can continue to promote the environmental and economic benefits of our system. Expanding access to higher-value premium markets will further strengthen farm profitability and help deliver better farm gate prices for Irish farmers, securing the long-term resilience of the industry.

Looking Ahead

As I pass hand over the presidency to Vinny Griffith, I thank him for his support during the year and wish him every success in his new role. A role I have no doubt that he will excel at. I look forward to continuing to work with the committee to organise our events for 2025/2026 and to engage with our members.

Irish Grassland Association CLG

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