

Catchment Science Conference 7 - 9 November

Edited by
Tom O'Connell,
ACP Communications
Officer

Over 200 scientists, advisors, farmers and representatives from agri-industry and the public sector recently gathered in Wexford to hear the latest on water catchment science. This was the fourth international conference hosted by the Agricultural Catchments Programme, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.



*Conference opening in Wexford
Bridget Lynch, Edward Burgess, Colm Markey and Tom
O'Connell*

Colm Markey, Fine Gael MEP, said that this conference was about the excellence of water catchments, and what we can do to improve water quality. There has been water sampling every ten minutes in six catchments over 15 years, so there is an incredible amount of data and an incredible amount of learnings from that data. This conference is sharing best practice here in Ireland with best practice from elsewhere in Europe.

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Teagasc Director Professor Frank O'Mara said; "Among the key ACP findings were that the underlying soil type and geology can override the effect of nutrient source pressures. There was no clear link between stream N and P concentrations and nutrient loading at small catchment scale. Targeted and efficient mitigation measures are required."

Speaking at the event, Bridget Lynch, researcher with the ACP said; "We have had a tremendous response with over 100 papers from national and international scientists. The conference is a blend of oral presentations, panel discussions, field trips, workshops and poster sessions. We have the full spectrum of actors working on water quality and gaseous emissions with scientists, policy makers, agri-industry, local authorities, county councils and other groups in attendance."



*Discussion panel on Governance and Policy
Thomas Ryan, Tirlán; Colm Markey, MEP; Phil Haygarth,
Lancaster University; David Wall, Johnstown Castle and
Caitriona Morrissey, Irish Farmers Journal*

Farmer Field Trips and Discussion Panel

Edward Burgess, Agricultural Catchment Specialist

On day two of the conference the delegates got an opportunity to enjoy the Irish countryside in Co. Wexford. They could choose to attend one of five field trips, which included a visit to two farms in our Ballycanew catchment. For some, it was their first time on an Irish farm and gave them a valuable insight into Irish agriculture and lessons from the ACP.

Aidan & Anne Murphy operate a sheep / beef farm with a pedigree enterprise (Texel sheep and Angus cattle). 'Foundry Texel's' pedigree sheep flock was established in 1999 and currently has 75 breeding ewes along with 45 replacement ewe lambs. Notably, in 2022 Anne was awarded the prestigious RDS Sheep Ireland Lamb Plus breeders index award for the flock. The farm has participated in various agri-environmental measures such as GLAS, the Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme, and National Beef Welfare Scheme.

Declan & Sylvia Power and their son, Clement, formed a young registered farm partnership and are in their third year milking with 130 Holstein Friesian cows. The farm was previously a mixed enterprise tillage, beef and sheep operation. To gain some experience, Clement spent time in New Zealand milking cows in 2017 prior to setting up the new enterprise. All milking facilities are new including a 20 unit herringbone parlour. Housing for the milking cows was built with the aid of a TAMS II grant, which was payable at an average rate of 50% on a total investment ceiling of €160,000 as the Powers were a registered farm partnership with a young farmer. They have plans to put up a new covered over ground slurry store to futureproof slurry storage.



Field trip option 3 - Evaluating sites for the implementation of Phosphorus and Sedimentation loss. Measures such as buffer traps, sediment traps and high flow diversion dams can allow farmers to reduce losses and help protect water quality. Image Credit: Brownes Photography

Following the field trips, the indoor sessions restarted with a discussion panel comprised of farmers from three of our catchments. The four farmers discussed their enterprises, interaction with the programme and the lessons they have learned from their participation. This is the first time such a farmer panel took place and delegates greatly appreciated insights provided by the farmers.



With Claire McCormack, farmer panel chair are; Mark Boland, Oisín Coakley, Sean Gregory, John Walsh, Edward Burgess, Colin Bateman, Kevin Madden & Kevin Feeney

Colin Bateman

Colin runs a mixed tillage farm in our Timoleague catchment and is also involved with an anaerobic digester plant located on his farm. Until its opening in 2019, Colin ran a substantial sheep flock. However, labour was becoming scarcer and he decided to get out of sheep completely. Interestingly, while the actual construction took just one year, the entire planning process from the initial idea to final commissioning took far longer.

Asked for his advice for any farmers considering an alternative business enterprise, Colin said preparation is key and the whole process always takes far longer than expected. However, he has no regrets and sees the AD operation a way of generating a sustainable future for his three daughters. One is undertaking Equine Studies at Kildalton College in Kilkenny while the second daughter is doing Chemical Sciences at TCD in Dublin. The youngest daughter is attending her local Secondary School.

Kevin Feeney

Kevin runs a sheep / cattle enterprise in our Cregduff catchment in Co Mayo. Comprising 25ha, the farm is highly fragmented and is split into seven parcels. The flock is mainly Texel and Suffolk with lambing starting in early February. Lambs are sold at 15-16 weeks through the South Mayo Lamb Producers Group. In addition, Aberdeen Angus calves are bought in with the aim of finishing them at 18-19 months and are sold to Jennings Meats, Ballinrobe. Kevin is married to Carmel and they have one daughter Chloe.

John Walsh

John runs a 280-cow spring calving dairy herd in our Timoleague catchment with the help of one full-time employee Niall O'Driscoll. Like most of his neighbours in West Cork, it is a grass-based system. John is married to Diane and they have two sons, Sean and Feargal. In the words of their father, they are both "mad for farming" and currently studying agriculture at Munster Technological University in Bishopstown on the outskirts of Cork City. As part of their course, both sons spent six months working on dairy farms in New Zealand earlier this year. They intend to farm at home with their father after completing their current studies.

While 2023 was a challenging year with both poor weather and low prices, John believes better times are ahead. Moreover, he is very positive about his involvement with the ACP; the information coming from it will secure both the future of his farm and that of Irish agriculture.



Field trip option 1 - Catch crops as a mitigation measure for N loss.

Image credit: Claire Nash, the Irish Farmers Journal

Sean Gregory

Together with his brothers Paul and Michael, Sean operates an arable drystock farm in our Dunleer catchment in Co. Louth. A wide range of crops is grown including winter wheat, spring and winter barley, oats, oil seed rape, maize and potatoes. The sheep flock consists of 220 ewes with the main crop lambing around St Patrick's Day. In addition to the sheep, 70 suckler cows are kept, mainly Limousin and Friesian. Males are finished as bull beef from 16 months onwards while females are finished a little later.

Asked about the 2023 harvest, Sean said it has been the most difficult year since 1985 which was also a wet year. For example, this year's spring oats was only cut in the second week of October. As Sean said; "2022 spoiled us with both its good weather and good prices; let's hope 2024 is a repeat!"



Group of Wexford farmers at the Gala dinner in Whites Hotel

Finally - Thank You

Tom O'Connell, Communications Officer

Our Catchment Science conference occurs every four years and gives the programme an opportunity to showcase our work and Irish agriculture to an international audience. For some of the staff, including myself, it was our fourth conference and, in my opinion, the best one yet! For this, I would like to thank the farmers who helped make this happen. In addition, I would like to acknowledge all the farmers in our six catchments for your

participation and goodwill since the start.

This newsletter is produced for the over 300 farmers in the ACP. All previous issues are available at www.teagasc.ie/agcatchments and for up-to-date weather information from our seven met stations visit www.acpmet.ie.

Please feel free to contact me at 087-0609620 / tom.oconnell@teagasc.ie for further information and also with any suggestions for future issues.



*Wishing each of you and your family a
Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2024*