

## Taking up the challenge

**I**nnovation has never been needed more throughout rural Ireland. This booklet gives a step by step guide to taking on the challenge of starting a business. Beginning with looking for and finding the right idea, it then shows you how to develop the idea fully.

It also takes you through vital areas like cash flow, marketing and listening to your customers to deliver what they really want.

The *Steps to Success* booklet is aimed at giving practical advice and key pointers. Most importantly, it features 12 businesses, the finalists in the first JFC innovation awards, and the people behind them. They have taken the plunge; they had the courage and conviction to follow through on their ideas and are reaping the rewards. You will learn a lot from them.

So, if you are thinking of starting a business or a new venture, this booklet is a great guide. Good luck and enjoy the challenge.

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**Paul McCarthy**

Paul McCarthy is a Rural Business Specialist with Teagasc. At the age of 18, Paul started his own business, a youth hostel, to fund his college education.



**Peter Young**

Peter Young is the editor of the on-off farm pages in the *Irish Farmers Journal*. He writes on innovation and starting businesses in rural Ireland.

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*Steps to Success* is produced in a joint venture between Teagasc, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (NI) and the Agricultural Trust, publishers of the *Irish Farmers Journal* and *The Irish Field*.

Editor: Peter Young | Contributor: Paul McCarthy, Teagasc | Design: Garrett Allen  
Cover: Owen McGauley | Chief sub-editor: Leslie Horgan | Imaging: Owen McGauley  
Artwork: Liz Hammick | Printing: Standard Printers, Galway

All editorial enquiries to: Peter Young (pyoung@farmersjournal.ie)

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# 1 LOOK FOR A GOOD IDEA

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# Taking the

## More than just a good idea

**S**o, you are searching for that amazing idea and suddenly you have a 'Eureka' moment. Sometimes, in my job I am lucky and get phone calls within two hours of such events.

Following intense discussion and practical direction we end our conversation.

I rarely get excited about such callers. Why? Finding a 'business' idea is not about such 'Eureka' moments. Generating business ideas is a process.

How do I start? Write everything

down. This is a crucial discipline. When people call after their 'Eureka' moment, I suggest they write their thoughts on one or two pages. Very few succeed. You can be different. There is no need for an essay; simple points are perfect.

Farmers have many resources but may not realise their importance. Listing them does not necessarily mean you will use them for your business; it simply opens possibilities. Resources might include:

- Land — what are the possibilities and the problems?

### CASE STUDY

**S**ucklers, sheep and tillage are run on the McCann farm at Ballinclare, Gorey, alongside a greyhound business developed over the years by Andrea's mother, Eilish. Sheep production is Andrea's passion but she knows that earning a full-time income would require huge numbers.

Her efforts went into finding an idea that would allow her to be self-employed, work on the land and have a small flock of 100 to 150 ewes.

After running the rule over many of her ideas, the one she chose to develop was a comprehensive greyhound rearing service for owners who don't have the time or facilities to have their budding champions cared for.

She developed the business plan during her 180-hour Teagasc 'green cert' course. Grainne O'Shea, Teagasc, Kildalton, was the one who encouraged her to enter into the JFC competition. In hindsight, the idea she has developed was the most obvious one, based on the skills and resources she had at her disposal.

Growing up Andrea had helped her

mother Eilish, in her successful business breeding and training greyhounds. The 'Ballinclare' racing prefix is well recognised within racing circles. Her market research for the greyhound business shows a colossal demand for high standard livery. The interest in greyhound racing is growing, the prize funds are increasing and syndicates, many urban based, are starting to buy greyhound pups. The Irish Greyhound Board estimates that 70,000 greyhound pups were born in Ireland in 2005.

Andrea plans to charge between €25 and €35/head a week for her service. At the end of year one her target is to have:

- Reared 20 puppies from 14 weeks to 10 months.
- Taken an initial 10 pups (called saplings) from 12 months to 15 months and have replaced them with more.
- Filled the whelping (birthing) kennel and have successfully whelped bitches and reared litters.
- Have a list of enquiries and future bookings.
- Hit the predicted gross turnover of



# first step

- Buildings — current use, any under-used or attractive?
- Borrowing — what are the limits?
- Skills — what are you good at? What are other family members' strengths?
- Location — ease of access, nearby population centres.
- Woodland — age, quality, potential uses.
- Water — are there any water features, water quality and flow. Can new water features be created?
- Current agricultural production, stock numbers/type, current land use?

What are you passionate about? To have a good chance with your idea,

you need to be so enthusiastic talking about it that you have the ability to almost overwhelm people.

Andrea McCann, for example, grew up with greyhounds. She has such a clear love and knowledge of the animals that you instantly know that any dog would thrive in her care. That is what passion is about.

Realise weaknesses in the business idea. Sometimes, people can be overly romantic about their idea and see no downside.

The easiest person to fool is yourself; be honest with the person who matters most — you.

There is nothing wrong with letting go of an idea when your analysis

## Key Points

- + Write everything down
- + List your resources and skills
- + Be passionate about your idea
- + Realise your weaknesses
- + Be honest with yourself

tells you so. Opportunities are all around us. Once you start actively focusing on generating ideas, you will be amazed at how many you come up with.

Look beyond copying your neighbours. Take note of times you are unable to get a product or service or are disappointed.

Start today with a pen and notebook.

— Paul McCarthy

## Andrea McCann Co Wexford

**BUILDING ON SUCCESS:** Andrea, with her hands full of some of the pups that her mother, Eilish, is rearing on their farm.



€60,000 and grow it quickly afterwards.

The manual work involved does not faze Andrea. Juggling a full-time job with working on the farm means she already had honed her time management skills. She knows the key will be giving a service good enough to ensure word of mouth. Andrea's new business will centre on a purpose-built shed with 10 loose kennels, 10 whelping kennels and five large puppy play areas.

It will be built on five acres, rented from her parents. Initial estimates for the shed and concrete are €60,000. Total costs when fencing, etc, is included, will be close to €100,000. The installation aid for new entrants of €15,000 is the first part. She has been to her bank but has done budgets to clearly show profit and an ability to repay the loan. She is also looking for funding through LEADER.

Like any good business plan, Andrea highlighted her weakness. The main one is delegation, especially as she plans to employ staff in the future. "I am aware from previous

experience that lack of delegation creates an atmosphere of distrust and bitterness and leaves the person who is left to delegate frazzled and exhausted," said Andrea. The other area is accounts and she has identified the need to work closely with her accountant.

Andrea's story is a prime example of how ideas do not have to be original. Sometimes the best idea is the one staring you in the face. The starting point is certainly to look at your own skills and resources.

— Peter Young



## CONTACT

Andrea McCann, Ballinclare,  
Gorey, Co Wexford  
Tel: 086-6014329  
andreamccann@eircom.net



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EXPLORE  
2 YOUR  
IDEAS

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# Exploring your ideas

**Y**ou have some ideas which you think could make a business. Firstly, be completely positive about them, as if you are definitely going to put them into action.

See it as a challenge that you are committed to seeing through. The message is simple — work at it.

Remember, developing ideas is a process. Ideas will not develop and opportunities will pass you by unless you go through the steps to bring them to maturity. Put simply, it will not happen unless you make it happen.

Ideas do not have to be new or technically complicated — just so long as the idea meets a need in the marketplace or is better than the competition. Develop the idea with the long-term in mind and not for a fast buck.

In your notebook, write out four points as to why you believe this business idea will work and four points why it will not. Play with your idea on paper to open it up; think in terms of ‘what ifs?’

Draw diagrams or pictures. Break up the business idea into all its different components; are there other ways of putting it together? Look at the idea in terms of your skills and resources that we discussed in Step 1.

Work out some very basic figures:

- What might a customer pay for the product or service?
- How much would it cost to make/buy in this product?
- How long would it take you to provide the service?
- What equipment/facilities would you need?
- Is there a decent margin?
- How do customers currently get this product or service? Think of the product or service from the customer’s perspective.

Jim Costello of Forest Products Ltd realised that customers were looking for something different. That is how the idea for their new range *Arbeo* developed.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**E**very company needs innovation. No matter how big or small, you cannot rest on your laurels. In order to maintain their competitive advantage and to stay at the cutting edge of their industry, Forest Products Ltd are developing a new range of value added products under a separate branded company, *Arbeo*. That is the idea, not the existing business that got them to the finals of the JFC innovation awards.

Combining two words, ‘arb’ meaning tree and ‘beo’ meaning life, has given them *Arbeo* — ‘tree of life’. It is a brand that they are developing to bring nature back into the life of customers.

They have been working on it for a number of years, co-operating with Teagasc and a design team.

The designs will be unique and will change to reflect the season, with berries used in autumn and fresh, vibrant coloured foliage used in spring and summer. Twigs will feature in the winter and they will use new plant materials and add value by extracting some of the natural essential oils derived from plant species.

The reasoning for their concept is

## Arbeo/Forest Products Ltd, Tralee, Co Kerry



### Key Points

- + First idea not always the best one.
- + Tease out your idea.
- + Is there a market?
- + Identify the resources needed.
- + Use expertise where needed.
- + Plan how you can service demand.
- + Can you make a profit?

**LEFT: Jim Costello, Arbeo brand manager pictured at his factory based in Tralee, Co Kerry.**

that they believe the environment is a big part of the future.

"People will be looking for spiritual experiences and Arbeo is being developed as a lifestyle company that could tap into the area," said Jim. They have worked with Enterprise Ireland and have looked at companies like Newbridge cutlery, who have transformed themselves by going into giftware. As you might have guessed, Jim and his company do not do things by halves. A lot of time and research and development have gone into this idea.

Their R&D programme has three elements:

- Production of a wide range of novel varieties to give Arbeo a different feel.
- Product design.
- Presentation — developing suitable packaging is vital to penetrate existing markets.

Brainstorming in the existing company has helped identify how to promote the Arbeo range. The main methods decided on were:

- Through their existing customer base.
- Promotional literature and website

(see [www.arbeo.com](http://www.arbeo.com)).

- Advertising campaign.
- Corporate outlets such as banks, hospitals, etc.
- At a local level through direct sales.
- The personnel touch: "People buy from people," said Jim. "We intend to use the enthusiasm of our people to push the sales strategy of Arbeo."

There is no point in going out shouting about your product if you do not have it made and ready for sale.

Arbeo do not intend to fall into that trap. They have already identified growers and sites for the additional planting programme for 2007. They intend to plant 70% of the existing species but also 30% new species from the Teagasc trials.

They have already started work with COFORD to harvest forest and wild foliage, all in an environmentally-friendly way.

They have focused on weddings to kick off the concept. One reason is that 20,000 weddings are held each year. The second is that it is the one day that everyone wants the 'wow' effect, as Jim puts it.

Customers can order centre pieces

and designs out of the warehouse or go for the next level that the company plans to offer. This is a bespoke wedding service in which a designer will work with the couple to make their dreams for the day come true. "We have already done a number of these and they are proving hugely popular," said Jim.

With any new idea, additional capital is needed. A restructuring of the company has started to establish the necessary finances. High targets have been set. They are planning to sell up to 500,000 units from year three onwards. At around €20 each, it is an idea that could really blossom.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Forest Products Ltd,  
Tralee, Co Kerry

Tel: 066 7121217  
[forestfoliage@eircom.net](mailto:forestfoliage@eircom.net)



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MAKING  
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# Taking the time challenge

**D**o you believe you have too much to do but too little time to do it? If you are too busy running the farm then you will never have the time to start a new business.

Think about what is currently urgent in your work — the things you must do soon, such as spreading fertilizer. Then think of some of the important things that you want to do but which always seem to end up at the bottom of your list, such as starting a new business or planning for succession. Write down three examples under each of the following headings:

- Urgent immediate tasks.
- Important tasks that need not be done immediately

Urgent tasks usually involve the daily routine work which must be done. Important tasks have the potential to make your farm viable and move your business forward in the long term. As the boss, you have to handle both. How?

Planning takes time, but planning saves time. If you have identified some important tasks, but know you are not giving them enough time, then you need to find ways of planning your time more effectively. If you cannot make time to plan then do not expect to gain more time.

Identify ways for handling the daily routine more efficiently so you can focus more on what is important but not urgent. This is what led George and Jason Stanley to design and build labour saving devices for saving time on their sheep farm.

The message is simple: you must allocate more of your time to important, long-term priorities, as per your list, to make it happen.

Before you start a task, work out how long you expect it to take. Afterwards, see how it compared with what you expected. This technique will help you learn from your own experience and make you value your time more.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**I**t started in 1995 when George Stanley, Errill, Co Laois, decided to quit his off-farm job driving a lorry and develop a sheep enterprise of 800 ewes. He also made the decision to ensure it was a one-man enterprise. One man and 800 ewes might have been okay in New Zealand, but in Ireland it normally means one thing — hard work and long hours.

With determination, George set about investing to ensure that the labour was reduced. Big investment was put into sheds and machines, like the Lucas for bedding and feeding the ewes. However, it was the ideas that did not cost much that I was most impressed with.

With the ewes and lambs out to grass, the existing sheds are used to manufacture the labour saving ideas during the summer.

George and his son, Jason, estimate that €15,000 will need to be invested in equipment, from welders to office equipment and computers. They have

## George and Jason Stanley, Co Laois



### Key Points

- + Keep a log of where your time goes for a week and review it.
- + Plan the use of your time.
- + Identify and cut out time wasting activities.
- + Contract out jobs such as fencing, fertilizer spreading, etc.
- + Reduce stock numbers.
- + Let go of rented land.
- + Invest in equipment that saves time.

**MAIN PICTURE:** Forking on the double — putting two forks into one speeds up the job of cleaning the straw that the sheep eat, according to George Stanley.

**TOP, LEFT:** The mobile sheep handling unit, which has many features.

**LEFT:** George with one of the sheep gates put together for the lambing season.

already been in talks with LEADER for funding options. Identifying courses to upskill was another topic that was discussed.

At the start they will manufacture to meet ongoing demand. The orders already on the books will be filled and more taken.

Jason plans to continue to work part-time initially. If things go well he will be able to work full-time. By that stage they could plan to build a specialised shed for the business.

They do not want to conquer the world overnight. It is a low risk, low cost approach that allows them to control the growth and profit of their business.

George and Jason's farm is the perfect advertisement for their business. A top notch sheep system means it is the Teagasc monitor farm for Laois; over 200 sheep farmers from across the country turned up recently for a walk on the Stanley farm. They have already got plenty of

national exposure in the *Irish Farmers Journal* and *Ear to the ground*. They even featured on a DVD on time management made by Teagasc. Farmers who saw and visited were impressed.

The four main pieces of equipment they intend to concentrate on are:

- Quick assembly shearing trailer — it can be set up in less than a minute and equipment is in reach of the shearer at all times.
- Multi-purpose feed hopper — worked with a quad bike, it is used to feed their 600 ewes in 10 minutes in the shed. It can also feed meal into hoppers in the field and be used to snack feed ewes on the ground.
- Mobile race/handling unit — this is used to sort lambs for treatment or drafting; one man can easily operate it. It is used in conjunction with footbaths, a turn-over crate and weighing scales. It is ideal on out-farms.

- Easy move mobile electric fence — to reduce labour when wintering ewe lambs.

On top of that, gate sheep hurdles will be made for sale. George will also work with farmers who have their own ideas. If you want to place an order, or contact George or Jason, the number is 086-8292731.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

George & Jason Stanley,  
Errill, Co Laois

Tel: 086 8292731  
shirleypstanley@hotmail.com



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**4 DO THE  
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# How you know if your idea is a winner

**Y**ou believe you have a winning idea. In between scribbling your idea down and actually starting the business there is important work to be done that will decide its success or failure.

Sometimes, entrepreneurs get so excited after their 'eureka' moment that they forget to find out if the idea is viable. You should make your decision based on facts, future trends in the marketplace and return on your investment — NOT on grant aid.

Of course, some ideas work anyhow, despite little or no market research. Others fail or underperform and can be a serious burden on farm and family finances for years.

Remember, good business people are risk takers, but they are measured risk takers. The more research you do the lower the risk will be. Don't take short-cuts; be prepared to do the leg work by picking up the phone and getting on the road.

Take a common sense approach and work out answers to these three questions:

- Who, if anyone, has a real need for the thing I propose to sell, and how many potential customers are there?
- How much, if anything, are they spending to address that need today?
- Does my product or service meet that need in a way that either saves or makes them money?

Answers, such as 'the potential is huge', or 'everyone wants it' are simply not good enough.

Michael Spellman and Mark Hanly's research was certainly thorough for their woodchip business idea.

An idea is just an idea until you get out there and do the donkey work on market research.

Keep it practical.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**M**ichael Spellman from Killeevan, Co Roscommon, has put in a huge amount of research for his business idea. The overall concept of Greengrove Wood Energy Ltd is the collection of wood from felled trees, forestry thinnings and timber mills. It will be then processed into a renewable fuel for burning in customised burners to produce heat for medium to large-scale commercial heat users. In developing the business, a report was commissioned by Clearpower Ltd. The key findings were:

- It found there was adequate supply of raw material in the region which will continue into the future.
- There is a potential margin in targeting commercial users that need 300 to 500KW installed capacity.
- There is a need to educate the target customers about cost savings and potential supply.
- The bulky nature of the product



## Greengrove Wood Energy Ltd, Co Roscommon



### Key Points

- + Look up the Internet — if you don't have the skill, find someone with it.
- + Identify and TALK to potential customers.
- + Gather information on the competition/alternatives.
- + List and contact agencies for help or training.
- + Travel to meet people who are in the business already.
- + Visit relevant trade shows.
- + Think like the customer.

**MAIN PICTURE:** Business partners Mark Hanly and Michael Spellman of Greengrove Wood Energy Ltd.

**TOP, LEFT:** Just under €300,000 of capital investment was needed at the beginning. Nearly two thirds of this was for a mobile woodchipper.

**LEFT:** The overall concept of Greengrove Wood Energy Ltd is the collection of wood from felled trees, forestry thinnings and timber mills.

means that transport costs are an important issue and wood fuel depots need to be located in close proximity to both the supply and end user.

- A target to process a minimum of 3,000 green tonnes at 50% moisture was set at the end of the first year.

Mark Hanly had one big thing that Micheal Spellman needed to make his plan work — facilities. Mark is managing director of Greenlawn Horticulture Ltd, his family's company that has made peat moss from their bog near Strokstown, Co Roscommon.

From running the business successfully for the last six years, it was clear that the bog had a limited lifespan. "I started to look for opportunities for the future and that's when I met Michael," said Mark.

Michael had been looking at building storage capacity on a greenfield site, a process that would have been a huge, time consuming and costly

project. He must have thought all his Christmases had come at once when he walked into Mark Hanly's shed.

The massive facility could hold thousands of tonnes of timber as it dried out before it was chipped.

Not only that but Mark had spare machinery capacity that could be used in the new business. A business partnership was formed and clear roles were identified.

With his contacts and research, Michael is in charge of sourcing raw material and selling the woodchips to the end users. Mark's strength is his mechanical knowledge. He is firmly in charge of the production process. Even with the facilities in place, just under €300,000 of capital investment was needed at the beginning. Nearly two thirds of this was for a mobile woodchipper, capable of chipping 24 to 25 tonnes/hour of dry material and 38 tonnes/hour of wet material.

A grant of €65,000 from mid-south Roscommon LEADER was a huge benefit. Drying the timber down to 33% dry matter is one of the biggest issues with the raw material.

The aim is to dry it naturally by piling it first outdoors and then in the shed.

Trials have already been done with wood left drying naturally outside for 12 months.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Greengrove Wood Energy Ltd, Co Roscommon

Tel: 086 8131651  
michaelspellman@eircom.net

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**5**  
DRIVING  
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# Drive your idea over the line

**Y**ou have done the homework on your idea; you see it for what it is, the pitfalls and the competition. You know the risks, not only the financial ones but the embarrassment factor if it fails. Brendan and Eilish Tierney of Kilconly, Tuam, Co Galway, started in the mushroom business in the early days.

They saw the opportunity, did the homework, took the risks and made money. They were also smart enough to get out before they lost what they made.

What impressed me most about the Tierneys and their wood pellet idea is their absolute determination to make it work. Apart from the large capital investment, the manufacture of wood pellets in Irish conditions, with high rainfall and humidity, is recognised as a formidable challenge.

The Tierneys know and understand the difficulties, they also see the opportunity especially that of getting into the market early.

Attending relevant trade fairs and conferences, and entering competitions such as the Innovation Awards, are great ways to network and talk with others in the business. You will also get valuable feedback on your business venture.

Make time for these tasks and be up for the challenge. Your business will definitely benefit as a result.

Sometimes, I believe that farmers do not trust their own judgment enough and as soon as someone, especially a professional such as an accountant, solicitor, bank manager or even a farm adviser says it will not work, they are willing to stop progress.

As the entrepreneur, try to strike a balance between listening to others and pushing ahead with your gut instincts.

Remember, it is your dream, your business and, most importantly, your future and the future of your family.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**W**hen Eilish Tierney did a course with Galway Renewable Development in 2003 on renewable energy, a light bulb went off in her head. She clearly saw the potential of using renewable energy sources. Wood pelleting was looked at and they scoured Ireland and abroad for information.

With the know-how, the next job was sourcing raw material. Local sawdust from a mill and local joinery were available. Then came the building of the operation which, for me, is the most fascinating part of the story.

Brendan Tierney is a genius when it comes to working out and putting together the plan. Brendan, along with his brother, Noel, were fitters in the old sugar plant; experience useful in the new development. A second-hand shed was purchased and extended to give enough height.

Brendan's theory was that you lifted the raw material up once and let gravity work for you on the way down to save energy. A pelleting machine was bought but many im-



## Irish Woodpellets Ltd, Kilconly, Tuam, Co Galway



**ABOVE:** Eilish and Brendan Tierney with Paul McCarthy in a mushroom tunnel that has got a new life storing and drying sawdust before pelleting.

**LEFT:** In something akin to a gigantic 30 metre tumble drier, which the Tierneys built themselves, the sawdust is put in one end and tumbles down to the other, dried by hot air blown into it.

### Key Points

- + Get independent advice.
- + Think and act big.
- + Be as well financed as possible at the start.
- + Buy in experience.
- + Work hard; recognise and accept the commitment required.
- + Get any necessary help and support — don't hold back.
- + Be straight with people.
- + Attempt to stay one step ahead of the market; keep focused on the customer/on being different.
- + Take chances after due consideration; trust your gut instinct.
- + Don't be deterred by failure — learn from it.
- + Be flexible — not everything will go to plan.
- + Recruit the best you can afford.

provisions were made in the process along the way — like the need for a vacuum to take out fine dust before pelleting and the use of an old diesel tank, standing upright, to store pellets after they were made.

With a growing market for wood pellets, the biggest challenge for the Tierneys was sourcing and drying raw material down to the 11% moisture needed for the pelleting process.

The moisture of some sawdust that they have bought has been up to 65%, which proved difficult and costly to dry. The Tierneys are using their old mushroom tunnels to store and dry sawdust. However, this is proving to be labour intensive and uneconomic.

They investigated a lot of different types of driers but found them extremely big, expensive and costly to run. So they built their own.

The Tierneys have made and sold their first pellets; it has been a massive undertaking. They got huge help from Peter Keavney in the Gal-

way Energy Agency. The local LEADER was hugely supportive and facilitated a grant of €65,000 to help fund the purchase of the pelleting equipment.

The Tierneys intend to produce 3,000 tonnes of pellets in the first year; half will be bagged and sold locally. They have linked up with Firestixx pellets, a leading Austrian company that has a franchise here, to distribute the remainder.

Selling at an average price of €170 a tonne, they estimate that the margin will be €20 per tonne. This would give a return of €60,000 in the first year. The output will then increase and extra staff will be taken on. Like any business, profitability will depend on the cost of raw material, keeping production costs low through efficient production and getting a good price for the end product.

A 50% increase in the price of sawdust, even before they started, showed the Tierneys the dangers of

having a limited number of sources. They intend to look at other sources and even other material, such as miscanthus, to reduce the raw material cost.

Rising drying costs are also eating into the margin and using other fuels to produce hot air is being examined. The Tierneys will have to keep tight control on all three to ensure that this exciting business gives a good return in the years ahead.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Irish Woodpellets Ltd,  
Kilconly, Tuam, Co Galway

Tel: 093 47677  
086 8547547



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**6 GET A  
HELPING  
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# Sourcing expert advice

**I**t is important that you know just what assistance is available to you as you start your business. It can help give you the final push to get you off the ground. Starting a business can be a lonely place; when someone else places confidence in you, or helps you in specific areas to make progress, it can propel you forward.

There is a wide range of State bodies charged with assisting entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs to develop their businesses.

Options for sourcing expertise include the following:

- Your local Teagasc adviser, County Enterprise Board or LEADER group.
- Other state agencies — Bord Bia, Food Safety Authority, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Fáilte Ireland, Enterprise Ireland.
- Training courses.
- Mentoring — the County Enterprise Board has a panel of mentors with extensive business experience and skills in a wide range of areas.
- Business associations — your local Chamber of Commerce, Small Firms Association, Institute for Small and Medium Enterprises and business networking groups in your area.
- Other businesses — you may think that everyone in a business like yours is a threat, but they are also a great source of expertise. If you feel that some are too local, don't hold back from travelling further afield to talk with other businesses and tap into their expertise.
- Third level institutions.
- The Innovation Voucher Scheme from Enterprise Ireland.
- Business innovation centres.
- Accountants and consultants.
- For more information on and links to websites see [www.teagasc.ie/startinyourownbusiness](http://www.teagasc.ie/startinyourownbusiness).

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**J**ohn and Benny Robinson have developed a successful business making handmade wooden farmyards on their 26-acre farm in Benburb, Co Tyrone.

The innovative idea came about when John looked for a decent farm set for his child. Finding only plastic ones, he decided to build one himself — in wood. Millwood Crafts was born.

As you walk past the real tractors in the machinery workshop, you suddenly come across a landscape of miniature farmyards in various stages of construction.

Over half of the old shed has been taken over at this stage. As I looked at the toys, like a little kid on Christmas morning, what struck me most was the detail and quality of each one.

With so much work obviously

## John and Benny Robinson, Benburb, Co Tyrone



### Key Points

- + Use expert advice.
- + Courses are available.
- + Mentoring is well worthwhile.
- + Tap into funding.
- + Streamline production.
- + Target high quality.
- + Use clever marketing.

**MAIN PICTURE:** Joe Mulholland (left) Rural Enterprise lecturer, CAFRE, with John Robinson of Millwood Crafts.

**LEFT:** The new farm business in the foreground with the old tractors in the back.

needed for each one, the biggest challenge was getting a return for the hours put into crafting the farmyards. The brothers have worked hard to make a mini-production line that Henry Ford would have been proud of. Over the past two years they have developed 14 different models. "Probably too many," admitted John. "We intend to scale back to seven specific farmyards to simplify production and focus marketing."

"Sometimes I think the parents are buying the farmyard sets for themselves rather than the kids," joked John as we talked about how he marketed his sets. He had just returned from the Cavan Machinery Show with a pile of orders. The retail price of their sets ranges from Stg£60 (€88) for the smallest model up to £220

(€325) for the deluxe farmyard. Dealing with customers in the machinery business for the last 16 years they are well able to sell. What really clinches the deals is their enthusiasm and belief in their products.

Without a huge budget for marketing, like any small business they have had to be very clever. They have given sets to local auctions and raffles for charities — a great way to get people to see what they do.

The main sales focus has been targeting the large crowds of rural dwellers at agricultural shows. They have already booked stands at the Ploughing and Tullamore Show.

As part of their export plan they intend to do a few shows in the UK next summer.

In their plan, they aim to grow

sales from €68,000 in the first year. They are currently looking for agents and retail outlets to sell their products and they have also spoken with toymakers to supply animals and the latest tractors and machinery to kit out their farms. It could prove to be an additional source of income without much work.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Millwood Crafts,  
Benburb, Co Tyrone

Tel: 048 37548477  
millwoodcrafts@hotmail.co.uk

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**7 OVER-  
COMING  
OBSTACLES**

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# Getting around obstacles

**W**hen intending rural entrepreneurs attend the Teagasc Rural Business start-up courses, two concerns are always brought up — planning permission and insurance.

Planning permission is often the biggest obstacle to starting a new business on the farm. It makes sense for farmers to make alternate use of buildings for a new business but, despite their best efforts and a lot of expense, too often farm-based businesses fail at the planning hurdle.

A few years back, Ivor Allen saved up money and renovated a shed on the farm with the intention of one day starting a business there. After going through a very lengthy and costly planning process of 18 months to ‘change the use’ of the building, he was eventually turned down for planning permission on grounds that the new business would be a road traffic hazard. At this stage many would have given up as the planning process had cost Ivor much of his savings. He eventually succeeded by getting a ‘change of use’ for a building on another site belonging to his brother, Keith. Take Ivor’s advice; if you fail at this hurdle, consider other possibilities such as an alternative site on the farm or, indeed, buying/renting a ready-made premises.

- Employ an experienced architect and get an early opinion on your proposal.
- Read up on your County Development Plan.
- Before applying for planning seek a pre-planning meeting with your local council planners to discuss if permission is feasible for your proposal.
- If your planning application fails, you may appeal the council decision, or the planning conditions relating to it, to an Bord Pleanála.

Be prepared for major obstacles to starting a new business and, like Ivor Allen, think outside the box to achieve your dreams.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**I**vor Allen always had an entrepreneurial streak. Every day that Ivor left his farm in Bal-laghmore, Borris-in-Ossory, Co Laois, to work in the boning hall in Glanbia, Roscrea, was a day to make money to set up his own business.

Many ideas were identified but he found it difficult to get one that he felt passionate enough about to drive forward.

Then one evening he was sitting beside the Aga cooker at home. “My mother said she would love to get the cooker re-enamelled but couldn’t find anyone to do it,” he remembers. Bang — the idea he had been waiting for hit him. He had worked at enamelling old cookers with the Leinster Foundry in Athy before it closed so knew the basics.

From that day on he threw himself into researching the idea to achieve his goal.



## Ivor Allen/'Looking Hot', Borris-in-Ossory, Co Laois



### Key Points

- + Being your own boss is a key driver to starting a business.
- + The right idea will come.
- + There will be knocks and obstacles put in your way.
- + Determination and self belief are vital.

**PICTURES:** Ivor Allen re-enamelling old cookers. It is done by sandblasting off the old enamel and then spraying on new enamel. This is dried to 130°C and then baked in a furnace at 760°C. It requires specialist equipment and skills.

Re-enamelling old cookers is done by sandblasting off the old enamel and then spraying on new enamel. This is dried to 130°C and then baked in a furnace at 760°C.

It requires specialist equipment and skills. The equipment is not cheap. Ivor has estimated that the total cost of setting up the equipment was close to €100,000.

He came across plenty of red tape and found it difficult to get information as there were few people with knowledge of the business.

The biggest difficulty was getting somewhere to set up the business. Ivor wanted to establish it in his yard in an existing shed. He runs 100 acres with his brother, keeping 40 suckler cows, so it would have been ideal.

However, when he went to apply for planning permission he hit a brick wall. He spent months and a lot of money trying to get it sorted out

but found it impossible. In the end he had to make the decision to move the business to his brother's yard.

There were other knocks:

- A generator recommended by a supplier wasn't strong enough. His advice is to take costly equipment on trial first before purchasing.
- He approached Ann Goodwin of Laois LEADER. When she saw the proposal LEADER were on board straight away.
- Even when everything was in place the process took some trial and error. "If it's not right, it has to be redone, which involves blasting off the old enamel and starting all over," said Ivor.

With the process fine-tuned, he plans to do at least four cookers a week. He is charging €650 to €850, plus VAT, depending on the size and make of

cooker. The owners send the parts to him to be re-enamelled.

Advertising his service is the next biggest challenge. "I got 'Looking Hot', my logo, and mobile number painted onto my van which is great advertising," said Ivor.

It's a great business and, as Ivor has already shown, no obstacle is going to stand in his way to develop it.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Ivor Allen/'Looking Hot',  
Borris-in-Ossory,  
Co Laois

Tel: 087 9910455

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**CASH  
IS KING**

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# Cash is the king

**C**onsider if you were starting a new job today, working 40 hours per week. You are told that you won't be paid until 1 October. On top of that, you are asked to pay for the overheads, equipment and outlay. This is the reality for start-ups.

It sounds simple; your business idea has to make money but getting your new business to generate cash can be a real challenge. Most new businesses are amazed at how much money goes out before it starts coming in. Why?

Like Angela Lacey, of Deerpark Farm Services, you will be delighted when you get your first customers; you will do everything for them and may be slow to ask for money. Luckily, Angela has a service business, which does not require any raw materials. Otherwise, even more money would be tied up.

New businesses can often be waiting 90 to 120 days for payment. The average figures for up-and-running businesses is close to 60; that's still two months.

Everything costs money and too often people go way over budget or completely underestimate the costs. Draw up a detailed and itemised list, right down to the pencils, and add in at least 20% for the unexpected.

Review your list and ask yourself: do I really need this item? Will it make me money? Can I buy it second-hand?

In the early days Angela did trojan work for her clients before asking for payment. She learned the hard way.

Now, when a new client, engages with Angela, she is paid a significant proportion up front.

You need to think smart and factor in how and when you expect to get paid when you are preparing cash projections.

Your projections serve as a benchmark to compare what you thought would happen with money coming in and going out over a period of a month to a year against what actually happened.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**T**urning a great idea into a profitable business is never easy. Angela Lacey of Deerpark Farm Services had a great idea. Farmers needed help with their herd tagging and registration problems. She gladly took them on and helped them out. However, the quickest lesson she learned was that cash flow — getting paid — was one of the most important parts of any successful business. It is the main reason why the majority of new businesses, even profitable ones, can fail.

“I naively started working with farmers who were in difficulty. The problem was that it's impossible to judge how many hours are needed to



## Angela Lacey of Deerpark Farm Services



Angela Lacey (standing)  
with work colleague  
Olivia Crowley.

untangle some of the issues,” said Angela. “You can go without getting paid for your own time at the start but there are overheads and other bills that have to be paid.”

The real lesson came after she put many hours into one case and helped the farmer untangle his problems. He turned around and refused to pay his bill. “I looked at my charging structure and realised it had to change,” said Angela.

Now she charges farmers a set fee before any work is done. This includes looking at the situation and a number of hours of working through the problems. After that, farmers are charged by the hours required, and

they all happily pay it. Word of mouth and her ability to sort out any problem means that clients continue to flow in.

“The Department started referring many of their problem cases to me but a growing number of my clients are farmers who just want to get everything right to avoid penalties under inspections,” said Angela.

Deerpark Farm Services has over 100 clients. Angela has taken on a part-time person to process some of the paperwork. The biggest challenge now is growing the business to the next level.

“I could fill every hour of the day working through cases myself. But

### Key Points

- + Cashflow is vital for any business.
- + Set budgets and cash projections for your business.
- + Keep them updated.
- + Charging structures are important.
- + New opportunities will arise.
- + Know what you want from your business.

there are only so many hours in the week, so I realised that I had take a step back and train others to do this role,” said Angela.

She saw opportunities in offering training and information seminars to teach farmers to maintain their own herd registers. Angela started a Certificate in Training and Development Course with the Irish Institute of Training and Development to upskill in this area.

She ran a successful pilot workshop in conjunction with IFA Skillnet when, over two days, farmers learned all they needed to sort out their herd registers and maintain them efficiently. More courses are planned.

Another option is to develop her business, nationwide.

Angela’s story shows that once you start a business you never know what doors it will open. The biggest challenge for Angela is to grasp the right opportunities.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Deerpark Farm Services,

Tel: 051 641106

[angela.lacey@deerparkfarmservices.com](mailto:angela.lacey@deerparkfarmservices.com)



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**9 BUILD  
ON  
SUCCESS**

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# Build on success

**Y**our business plan is necessary for grant aid, banks and so on, but you, more than anyone, will benefit from a practical, honest plan that sets out how you will take your idea forward to reality. You certainly don't need a qualification to write a business plan, but you may need some help and guidance in certain areas. Get started and you will realise you already have a lot of the work done and it is more a case of assembling the plan.

Ben and Charlotte Colchester's plan sets out what they will do during years one, two and three and how they will be very much guided by their customer feedback as well as trends in the marketplace.

Thoughts of producing a profit and loss account and cash flow for a new business can be daunting. You don't need an accountant to come up with the figures. Break sales and costs into small parts so that the figures don't look as if they are appearing out of nowhere.

Put the time into working up a practical business plan that you understand. When your business is up and going, some things won't turn out as you expected, or happen as fast.

Review and update your business plan at least once a year to keep you and family members focused.

The more you can break parts of the plan into simple but meaningful tasks, with dates and goals, the more practical it will be for you. The following are examples:

- Carry out market research by 1 September by attending trade exhibitions, relevant conferences, talking to Teagasc and others in similar businesses, by checking the Internet, etc.
- Complete as business start-up course by end of October.
- Revise and complete your business plan by the end of November,
- Apply for planning permission by Christmas.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**B**en and Charlotte Colchester's Drumeen farm in Urlingford works with a system called 'consumer supported' agriculture. Giving the customers what they want, in the way they want it, has been their key to success.

They first established what their potential consumer wanted and then went about producing it.

They believe that some customers want to go to the farm where the product is produced. They have proved this over the last 10 years. Their business has grown, allowing them to sell over 200 lambs, 15 cattle, 3,500 chickens, 1,200 turkeys and 5,000 lbs of honey, all produced on the farm and sold directly to around 400 customers.

"We organise to sell the produce on 24 days throughout the year, coin-

## Ben & Charlotte Colchester, Drumeen farm, Urlingford



### Key Points

- + Identify the idea.
- + Research.
- + Do the figures — is there potential profit?
- + Plan the production.
- + Sell the product.
- + Listen to your customers.

**MAIN PICTURE:** Pressing the oil seed. The oil seed is fed into the press where it is slightly heated and pressed. The oil is filtered and the high protein feed is left.

**TOP LEFT:** Ben and Charlotte Colchester.

**LEFT:** A helping hand — Ben made up this barrier to herd sheep easily around the yard.

ciding the chicken kill with lamb and beef.”

Their farm was developed around this model, from producing their own beef, lamb and poultry, to landscaping the farm to ensure that customers got a real feel for the place when they arrived. They even built an on-farm abattoir to ensure perfect traceability. Also, they have developed sales to markets, box schemes, family butchers and for Internet buying.

With a solid business plan their focus is on adding to the range of products each customer can buy. They planted 50 acres of broadleaf forestry and will start thinning the first of the planting this winter. The thinnings will be sold as bagged logs to their customers.

The couple also are about to produce organic rape seed salad dressing

oil, cold pressed on the farm.

Reading through their business plan gives a great insight into how they go about integrating a new idea into their existing business.

Their need to diversify was borne out of necessity. “We had bought 50 acres of marginally peat and gravel hill land and simply needed extra income to survive,” said Ben.

They initially started relief milking and contract fencing, jobs that were more or less unheard of at the time. The fencing led on to building their own plant to produce stakes and the importation of high tensile sheep wire. They even designed and manufactured the first Irish post driver, which they sold throughout the country and Britain. The business grew to employ 10 people and allowed them to buy

another 150 acres of land.

Selling their fencing business allowed them to develop their original business model. They always wanted to farm organically and were pioneers in developing the organic system and standards in this country.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Ben & Charlotte  
Colchester, Drumeen  
farm, Urlingford

Tel: 056 8831411  
drumeenfarm@hotmail.com

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LAUNCH THE  
BUSINESS

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# Out to launch

**B**ill Gates famously said: “If I was down to my last dollar, I’d spend it on PR”. Public relations can be a highly effective method of boosting your image and increasing business, even if your budget is minimal.

Get it right — first time. The launch of your business is a great opportunity to get free publicity. The aim of this free publicity is to attract business. Consider the following to ensure that you get both free publicity and business:

Are you really ready to launch? Too often when people start a business they look for free publicity and when they inevitably get the rush, they are simply not ready.

The local press — your new friend. Your customers are most likely to be local and they are also interested in local news. Your business launch is also a local news story, and a good photo can be the deciding factor in getting your story published.

People talk. Give people something great to talk about by treating customers with respect, providing good customer service and value for money.

Ask customers to help you reach others who can benefit from the services you provide. With a little encouragement, individuals will help you spread the word to others.

Stay in touch with your customers and this will increase the likelihood of them talking. There are always plenty of reasons for being in touch with people.

Think small as well as big. Church newsletters and local community Internet sites can be very effective.

Competitions are great for free PR. Winning even local prizes or awards means that someone else has endorsed your product and it gives you an extra reason to shout about your business.

Like greenbee.ie, it will get your business lots of free publicity.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**G**reenbee.ie is an online virtual market, promoting a lifestyle of sustainable living. Website owners Jo Nash and Gina Geagan hope to capitalise on the wave of individual awareness that issues like climate change and environmental impact are stirring up.

“Despite all the talk of sustainable living and environment, we found there was nowhere you could go to get the information you needed. Producers and suppliers were also frustrated in that they were finding it difficult to contact their potential customers,” said Jo.

Their aim is simple: to be the first website to connect the two sides across the country.

What started as developing a farmers’ market in Bundoran, soon turned into something with a bit more sting — greenbee.ie

Now they are busy getting producers and suppliers to advertise their



# step 10

Jo Nash & Gina Geagan of Greenbee.ie



## Key Points

- + Advertising your business is vital.
- + Make sure you can deliver.
- + Box clever to keep costs down.

MAIN PICTURE: Gina Geagan and Jo Nash of greenbee.ie

LEFT: The greenbee.ie homepage.

products in different sectors on their site.

"This comes down to wearing out shoe leather and meeting with the suppliers face to face to sell them our story," said Jo. So far, it has proved to be an easy sell, with the number of members increasing each week.

Once people get on their site they can flick through different sectors, like gardening, shops, farmers markets, etc, all with an environmental focus. It is broken down further in regional areas so that people can see their nearest supplier or producer.

Access to the website is free. Revenues will be generated initially by charging suppliers and producers to become members and then pay for different levels of advertising.

They have funding and support already in place from Leitrim Enterprise Board and Invest NI.

The launch will be backed by a strong advertising campaign, using

television, radio and regional and national newspapers.

"We want to be more than online yellow pages. The biggest challenge will be to have excellent content and make the site fun to visit. We are planning to have lots of handy tips and information on how people can make a difference," said Gina.

Greenbee.ie has a good budget for the launch. The business model needs to advertise strongly to become well known to its potential customers. Most small businesses do not have big budgets but, by boxing clever, they can get the word out at low cost.

However, there are many traps you can fall into. The first is telling the radio or newspaper advertising person what you want to spend. Once they know they will spend it for you. Free advertising is always the best. You have to find an angle or, as one of my colleagues

always says, 'a hook' that will get the media interested. A launch is always a good idea, even if it is only a photographic opportunity. Local papers want local news. Make sure you can tell your story well. Make it easy for them by sending in a photo and a news piece.

Correct signage and directions are important, especially if you are in a rural area. Word of mouth will always be the biggest draw.

— Peter Young



## CONTACT

Jo Nash & Gina Geagan  
greenbee.ie

www.greenbee.ie

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LISTEN  
TO YOUR  
CUSTOMER

12

# Lend them your ears

**I**n starting your business your customers should be your top priority. Take time every day to ask customers how you are doing. Actively listen to what they have to say. Make some notes. Discuss and share customer feedback with relevant staff or family members. What improvements can be made to products?

Focus on doing your best for your customers. Play your own game and know what the competition is doing, but don't let them take over your thinking. If you're too worried about what your competition is doing to outsmart you, then you will never be able to satisfy your customers.

Remember, customers buy benefits, not features. Customers are unique. Each buys for his or her own reason.

Develop a customer satisfaction survey and send it to your customers. Analyse and use the results to improve your service. Do this survey annually to compare. A small prize will incentivise customers to respond and may also be a PR opportunity when you announce the winner.

The right to do business has to be earned — never assumed. Create a partnership approach and build relationships with your customers.

Treat the customer as a participant and engage with them.

Be flexible. Most of us learn at a very early age that everything doesn't happen the way we want or expect it to all the time. So we frequently need to adapt to changing situations.

Adapting and being flexible, based on customer feedback, can make you a top performer.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**P**adraig Gilligan and his son, Alan, have taken risks over the past 19 years developing Gilligans Farm Fresh Meats. But enthusiasm and drive cleared the path for success to follow.

Now, with a business turnover of over €2 million, they are adding value to their beef. They are a prime example of how every business needs constant innovation to grow.

Most importantly, they show the need to listen to your customers.

In 1987, Padraig was farming 120 acres at Fourmilehouse, Co Roscommon. He was finishing cattle and working part-time driving a lorry.

Sick of the price he was getting for his beef, he went out and bought a butcher's shop with a small abattoir attached.

The idea was simple — to kill and sell his own beef through the shop. In time, he started to sell to other shops and found that this was where the



# step 11

## Gilligan Farm Fresh Meats, Co Roscommon



### Key Points

- + Be proactive for change.
- + Listen to your customers.
- + React to what they are saying.

**MAIN PICTURE:** Gilligan Farm Fresh Meats now processes 60 cattle a week that have been finished on the Gilligan farm.

**TOP, LEFT:** Alan and Padraig Gilligan in their on-farm processing plant.

**LEFT:** The pink beef is packed into trays that are sold to butchers, local supermarkets, restaurants and local people.

potential of his business lay. Opportunities grew as many other small abattoirs closed down due to increased regulations.

Refocusing the business, Padraig made the decision to sell the butcher's shop to invest in a purpose-built meat factory on his farm.

Once started, he soon developed an excellent reputation for quality, locally produced meat.

A boning facility, processing area and offices were added to cater for growing demand.

The business now processes 60 cattle a week, and some sheep, for sale to butchers, local supermarkets, restaurants and local people.

What makes the Gilligans different is that they have developed their own system to produce pink beef with white fat.

They carefully select Continental heifers to be finished on their own farm. These go through an intensive

60-day feeding programme, getting a special diet to make sure that the meat is pink in colour.

Currently, 75% of the feedstuffs are grown on the farm, but there are plans to increase this to 90% over the next three years. Woodchip bedding is used under the cattle to increase their comfort. They are walked across in small groups to the abattoir to reduce the stress before slaughter. "In the factory, this whole approach has led to increased yield and quality of meat. The feeding boost tenderises the meat, which is hung for seven days before processing in the plant," Padraig said.

Listen carefully to your customers — they hold the secrets of your success. Padraig noticed an increase in requests for added value products. "The trend is fuelled by the number of supermarkets who no longer employ butchers to prepare cuts in-house," said Padraig.

So, to help his customers, Gilligan Farm Fresh Meats are developing a product range of added value. As well as a range of tray-packed meat, they will produce burgers, mince and stir fry beef. The tray packing has really taken off since they started. The aim is to add value to 20% of the output and increase this to 30% in the years ahead.

— Peter Young



### CONTACT

Gilligan Farm Fresh Meats, Co Roscommon

Tel: 090 6629788  
gilligansmeats@eircom.net



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ENJOY THE  
CHALLENGE

# Get the structure right

**O**ne of the greatest difficulties with starting a business is that it falls to one person to cover every aspect of it, and you may not have the time or the range of skills to manage.

GrainEco overcame this by working in a team of six, each responsible for a particular area — marketing, PR, finance, product development, crop agronomy, sales, distribution, IT and secretarial. It's worth keeping an open mind to the possibility of a joint business venture. Naturally, this comes with its own set of problems — disagreements, illness, change of direction, etc. Mutual respect is a prerequisite, as is regular communication.

The only real option for GrainEco was the company route. With six people involved, it is complicated, but not impossible. Much time and effort has gone into working out their shareholders' agreements.

Every eventuality is being planned for to protect their new business venture and to keep it independent from individual members' interests, even though it relies on those members' resources, such as weighbridges, storage facilities and equipment. If the company doesn't plan and look ahead, then it can get very messy.

The choice of legal structure for your business is important. Factors to be considered include:

- The number of people involved.
- Projected future expansion.
- Risk factors.
- Amount of start-up capital required, and the possible sources of funding.
- Tax considerations.

It is highly recommended that you consult an accountant or solicitor before choosing an ownership structure for your business. The following are the main choices:

- Sole trader.
- A partnership.
- A plc.

— Paul McCarthy

## CASE STUDY



**“W**e could all see opportunities in the developing renewable sector. However, by coming together, we wanted to break the previous cycles that have left farmers at the bottom of the chain, supplying a raw material for someone else to add value.”

That's the reason why Andrew Bergin, Liam Dunne, Colm Flynn, Mervyn McCann, Alan Salter and David Walsh Kemmis came together, to form GrainEco.

As progressive tillage farmers, they all had reacted in the past to dramatic changes in the industry. The six know each other well. They had developed a strong bond through different discussion and purchasing groups, and even a machinery sharing arrangement that a number of them developed to cut their costs and labour bills.

Trials have shown the potential of

# step 12

GrainEco



## Key Points

- + Working together has huge benefits.
- + Correct business structures are critical.
- + Allocate clear responsibility.
- + Set targets and monitor them.
- + Keep up with innovation.

**MAIN PICTURE:** Black oats ready for burning.

**TOP, LEFT:** The GrainEco team (from left), Colm Flynn, Mervyn McCann, Liam Dunne, Andrew Bergin and Alan Salter. Missing is David Walsh Kemmis.

**LEFT:** Performance of the burners needs to be observed carefully and improvements made if needed.

black oats and the idea of burning cereals as fuel is becoming more accepted.

While waiting for their next fuel load to grow and be harvested, the group has done a huge amount of work behind the scenes. "Setting up a business with six people needs structure. We set up a limited company and worked hard at developing a shareholders' agreement," said Andrew Bergin. This is a vital document setting out the remit of the business and the direction in which it should be heading.

"We have also split into two groups, leaving three with the technical end of growing and burning the oats and three with business development," said Andrew.

"Each farmer has specific responsibility under these headings. It was a case of playing to people's strengths to make sure the right person had the right job," he added.

The targets for GrainEco have changed very little in the last six months, even with large fluctuations in wood pellet prices. "We already have crops in the ground that will deliver 350 to 400 tonnes of black oats this autumn. GrainEco has been registered with the Department as a processor of energy crops. This ensures that the farmers growing the oats get a €125/ha energy payment, which works out at around €20 a tonne," Andrew told me.

Plans to harvest and transport to three of the farmers' stores for drying are already in place and the group has decided to supply a number of medium sized commercial users this year. "This allows us to monitor the performance of the burners carefully and improve them if needed," said Andrew. "The next big step is this harvest, when we have to make decisions for sourcing seed and planting to expand

production for 2008. We have set a target to produce 1,500 tonnes — a fivefold increase. This takes a new level of commitment from the farmers as it starts to have a bigger impact on their existing businesses," he added.

By next autumn they plan to employ a manager and offer contracts to grow the oats so as to ensure a greater supply.

— Peter Young



## CONTACT

GrainEco

Tel: 086 2784897  
sales@graineco.com

# contacts

## Leader organisations

Leader website: [www.ilsu.ie](http://www.ilsu.ie)

### **Arigna Leader**

Arigna Enterprise Centre, Arigna,  
Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Roscommon.

Fax: 071-9646188

e-mail: [arignaleader@iol.ie](mailto:arignaleader@iol.ie)

Arigna Leader, Ballinamore Business Park,  
Willowfield Road, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim.

Tel: 071-9644881

e-mail: [arignaleader@iol.ie](mailto:arignaleader@iol.ie)

### **Carlow Leader**

Carlow Leader Rural Development,  
Company Ltd, McGrath Hall, Station Road,  
Bagenalstown Co. Carlow.

Tel: 059-9720733

e-mail: [carlowleader@eircom.net](mailto:carlowleader@eircom.net)

### **Cavan/Monaghan**

Cavan/Monaghan Rural Development,  
Ballyhaise Agricultural college, Cavan.

Tel: 049-4338477

e-mail: [administrator@cmrd.ie](mailto:administrator@cmrd.ie)

### **Clare**

Clare Rural Resource Development,  
Shannon Business Centre, Town Centre,  
Shannon.

Tel: 061-361144

e-mail: [info@rrd.ie](mailto:info@rrd.ie)

### **Cork/Blackwater**

Cork/Blackwater Resource Development,  
The Showgrounds, Fermoy.

Tel: 025-33411

e-mail: [info@blackwater-resources.com](mailto:info@blackwater-resources.com)

### **East Cork**

East Cork Area Development, Middleton  
Community Enterprise Centre, Knockgrif-  
fin, Middleton

Tel: 021-4613432

e-mail: [info@ecad.ie](mailto:info@ecad.ie)

### **West Cork**

West Cork Leader Co-Operative  
Society Ltd, West Cork.

Tel: 023-34035

e-mail: [wclc@wclc.iol.ie](mailto:wclc@wclc.iol.ie)

### **Donegal**

Donegal Local Development Company,  
Millenium Court, Pearse Road, Letterkenny.

Tel: 071-9127056

e-mail: [info@dldc.org](mailto:info@dldc.org)

### **Galway**

Galway Rural Development Company Ltd,  
Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway

Tel: (091) 844335

e-mail: [grd@grd.ie](mailto:grd@grd.ie)

### **Kerry**

Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta,  
Baile an Fheirtéaraigh,

Trá Li, Co. Chiarrai

Tel: (066) 915 6400

Riomhphost: [eolas@mfg.ie](mailto:eolas@mfg.ie)

### **Arainn**

Comhfhail Oileain na hEireann

Inis Oirr, Arainn, Co na Gaillimhe

Tel: (099) 75096

Riomhphost: [eolas@oileain.ie](mailto:eolas@oileain.ie)

### **South Kerry**

South Kerry Development,  
The Old Barracks, Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry

Tel: (066) 9472724

e-mail: [info@skdp.net](mailto:info@skdp.net)

### **Kildare**

Kildare European Leader Teoranta,  
Woods House, Clane Co. Kildare.

Tel: 045-861973

e-mail: [info@kelt.ie](mailto:info@kelt.ie)

### **Barrow Nore Suir**

Barrow Nore Suir Rural Development,  
42 Parliament Street, Kilkenny

Tel: 056-7752111

e-mail: [info@bnsrd.com](mailto:info@bnsrd.com)

### **Laois**

Laois Leader Rural Development Company,  
Pepper's Court, Portlaoise

Tel: 0502-61900

e-mail: [info@laois-leader-rdc.ie](mailto:info@laois-leader-rdc.ie)

### **Ballyhoura**

Ballyhoura Failte, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick

Tel: 063-91300

### **Longford**

Longford Community Resources Ltd  
Longford Internet Co-op, C/O Longford  
Library, Town Centre, Longford.

Tel: 043-41124 e-mail: [info@longford.ie](mailto:info@longford.ie)

### **Louth**

Louth Leader, Market Street, Ardee.

Tel: 041-6857375

e-mail: [info@louthleader.com](mailto:info@louthleader.com)

## County Enterprise boards

### **Carlow**

Enterprise House, O'Brien Road, Carlow.

Tel: (059) 9130880, Fax: (059) 9130717

Email: [enterprise@carlow-ceb.com](mailto:enterprise@carlow-ceb.com),

Website: [www.carlow-ceb.com](http://www.carlow-ceb.com)

Chief Executive Officer: Michael P. Kelly

### **Cavan**

Cavan Innovation & Technology Centre

Dublin Road, Cavan

Tel: (049) 4377200, Fax: (049) 4377250

Email: [info@cceb.ie](mailto:info@cceb.ie)

Website: [www.cavanenterprise.ie](http://www.cavanenterprise.ie)

Chief Executive Officer: Vincent Reynolds

### **Clare**

Mill Road, Ennis, Co. Clare.

Tel: (065) 6841922, Fax: (065) 6841887

Email: [clareceb@clareceb.ie](mailto:clareceb@clareceb.ie)

Website: [www.clareceb.ie](http://www.clareceb.ie)

Chief Executive Officer: Eamonn Kelly

### **Cork City**

Unit 1/2, Bruach na Laoi, Union Quay, Cork.

Tel: (021) 4961828, Fax: (021) 4961869

Email: [info@corkceb.ie](mailto:info@corkceb.ie)

Website: [www.corkceb.ie](http://www.corkceb.ie)

Chief Executive Officer: Dave Cody

### **Cork North**

The Enterprise Office, 26 Davis Street,  
Mallow, Co Cork.

Tel: (022) 43235, Fax: (022) 43247

Email: [corknnt@iol.ie](mailto:corknnt@iol.ie)

Website: [www.theenterpriseoffice.com](http://www.theenterpriseoffice.com)

Chief Executive Officer: Richie Holohan

### **South Cork**

Unit 6a, South Ring Business Park,  
Kinsale Road, Cork.

Tel: (021) 4975281, Fax: (021) 4975287

Email: [enterprise@sceb.ie](mailto:enterprise@sceb.ie)

Website: [www.sceb.ie](http://www.sceb.ie)

Chief Executive Officer: Sean O'Sullivan,  
(Acting)

### **West Cork**

8 Kent Street, Clonakilty, Co. Cork.

Tel: (023) 34700, Fax: (023) 34702

Email: [enterprise@wceb.ie](mailto:enterprise@wceb.ie)

Website: [www.wceb.ie](http://www.wceb.ie)

Chief Executive Officer: Michael Hanley

### **Donegal**

Enterprise Fund Business Centre, Ballyraine,  
Letterkenny Co. Donegal.

Tel: (074) 9160735, Fax: (074) 9160783

Email: [info@donegalenterprise.ie](mailto:info@donegalenterprise.ie)

Website: [www.donegalenterprise.ie](http://www.donegalenterprise.ie)

Chief Executive Officer: Michael Tunney

### **Dublin City**

5th Floor, O'Connell Bridge House, D'Olier  
Street, Dublin 2

Tel: (01) 635 1144, Fax: (01) 635 1811

Email: [info@dceb.ie](mailto:info@dceb.ie)

Website: [www.dceb.ie](http://www.dceb.ie)

Chief Executive Officer: Greg Swift

### **South Dublin**

3 Village Square, Tallaght, Dublin 24.

Tel: (01) 4057073, Fax: (01) 4517477

Email: [info@scenterprise.ie](mailto:info@scenterprise.ie)

Website: [www.scenterprise.ie](http://www.scenterprise.ie)

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# DARD supports NEW IDEAS FROM FARM FAMILIES

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) supports and encourages farm families throughout Northern Ireland to consider, and where appropriate, implement diversification projects to enhance farm incomes.

DARD Rural Enterprise Advisers help clients to clarify their business ideas by discussing potential opportunities. We encourage clients to develop a business plan through participation in the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) *Diversification Challenge - Business Planning*. This programme is delivered to farm family members at venues across Northern Ireland and provides participants with an opportunity to acquire the skills needed to assess a diversification idea and produce a business plan for the establishment of a new rural enterprise. Our Advisers provide individual mentoring to clients as they develop their business plan and can also provide guidance on potential sources of funding support.

In addition, for those of you who are ready to start up a new business ongoing support is available to help with the establishment and development of your new business through participation in CAFRE's *Diversification Challenge - Business Start*.



*John McLaughlin, Causeway Fencing Services, Bushmills explains the operation of his specialist fencing equipment to Gerry Burns, Rural Enterprise Adviser, Antrim.*



*Phyllis Kerr (left) of 'House of Kerr', Dungannon who designed and supplied commercial sweatshirts for Hazel Fulton (right) of 'R Fulton Quads', Dungiven. Both businesses participated in the Diversification Challenge - Business Start Programme. Pictured centre are John Sands, Senior Lecturer in Rural Enterprise, CAFRE and Glynnis Mills, Rural Enterprise Adviser, Magherafelt.*

## Options available to you

**Diversification Challenge  
- Business Planning**

**Diversification Challenge  
- Business Start**

If you are considering the establishment of a diversification project and would like to speak to your local Rural Enterprise Adviser please telephone  
**(028) 9052 4406**

# contacts

Chief Executive Officer: Loman O'Byrne  
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown  
Nutgrove Enterprise Park, Nutgrove Way,  
Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.  
Tel: (01) 4948400, Fax: (01) 4948410  
Email: [info@dlrceb.ie](mailto:info@dlrceb.ie)  
Website: [www.dlrceb.ie](http://www.dlrceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Michael Johnson

## Fingal

Mainscourt, 23 Main Street, Swords,  
Fingal, Co Dublin.  
Tel: (01) 8900800, Fax: (01) 8139991  
Email: [info@fingalceb.ie](mailto:info@fingalceb.ie)  
Website: [www.fingalceb.ie](http://www.fingalceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Oisín Geoghegan

## Galway County and City

Woodquay Court, Woodquay, Galway.  
Tel: (091) 565269, Fax: (091) 565384  
Email: [therese@galwayenterprise.ie](mailto:therese@galwayenterprise.ie)  
Website: [www.galwayenterprise.ie](http://www.galwayenterprise.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Charles Lynch

## Kerry

County Buildings, Tralee, Co. Kerry.  
Tel: (066) 7183522, Fax: (066) 7126712  
Email: [kerryceb@kerrycoco.ie](mailto:kerryceb@kerrycoco.ie)  
Website: [www.kerryceb.ie](http://www.kerryceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Martin Collins

## Kildare

The Woods, Clane, Co. Kildare.  
Tel: (045) 861707, Fax: (045) 861712  
Email: [info@kildareceb.ie](mailto:info@kildareceb.ie)  
Website: [www.kildareceb.ie](http://www.kildareceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Donal Dalton  
Kilkenny  
42 Parliament Street, Kilkenny.  
Tel: (056) 7752662, Fax: (056) 7751649  
Email: [enquiries@kceb.ie](mailto:enquiries@kceb.ie)  
Website: [www.kceb.ie](http://www.kceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Sean McKeown

## Laois

Unit 1, Portlaoise Enterprise Centre, Clonmi-  
nam Business Park, Portlaoise, Co Laois.  
Tel: (057) 866 1800, Fax: (057) 866 1797  
Email: [admin@laoisenterprise.com](mailto:admin@laoisenterprise.com)  
Website: [www.laoisenterprise.com](http://www.laoisenterprise.com)  
Chief Executive Officer: Maria Callinan

## Leitrim

Business Park, Dublin Road,  
Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim.  
Tel: (071) 9620450, Fax: (071) 9621491  
Email: [info@leitrimenterprise.ie](mailto:info@leitrimenterprise.ie)  
Website: [www.leitrimenterprise.ie](http://www.leitrimenterprise.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Joe Lowe

## Limerick City

The Granary, Michael Street, Limerick.  
Tel: (061) 312611, Fax: (061) 311889  
Email: [info@limceb.ie](mailto:info@limceb.ie)  
Website: [www.limceb.ie](http://www.limceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Eamon Ryan

## Limerick County

Limerick County Lower Mallow Street,

Limerick.

Tel: (061) 319319, Fax: (061) 319318  
Email: [info@lcoeb.ie](mailto:info@lcoeb.ie)  
Website: [www.lcoeb.ie](http://www.lcoeb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Ned Toomey

## Longford

Longford Enterprise Centre, Templemichael,  
Ballinalee Road, Longford.  
Tel: (043) 42757, Fax: (043) 40968  
Email: [info@longfordceb.ie](mailto:info@longfordceb.ie)  
Website: [www.longfordceb.ie](http://www.longfordceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Michael Nevin

## Louth

Quayside Business Park, Mill Street,  
Dundalk, Co. Louth.  
Tel: (042) 9327099, Fax: (042) 9327101  
Email: [info@lceb.ie](mailto:info@lceb.ie)  
Website: [www.lceb.ie](http://www.lceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Ronan Dennedy

## Mayo

Mc Hale Retail Park, Mc Hale Road,  
Castlebar, Co. Mayo.  
Tel: (094) 9024444, Fax: 094 9024416  
Email: [ffullard@mayococo.ie](mailto:ffullard@mayococo.ie)  
Website: [www.mayoceb.com](http://www.mayoceb.com)  
Chief Executive Officer: Frank Fullard

## Meath

Enterprise Centre, Trim Road, Navan,  
Co Meath  
Tel: (046) 9078400, Fax: (046) 9027356  
Email: [mhceb@meath.com](mailto:mhceb@meath.com)  
Website: [www.meath.com](http://www.meath.com)  
Chief Executive Officer: Hugh Reilly  
Monaghan  
Unit 9, M:TEK Building, Knockaconny,  
Monaghan Tel: (047) 71818, Fax: (047) 84786  
Email: [info@mceb.ie](mailto:info@mceb.ie)  
Website: [www.mceb.ie](http://www.mceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: John McEntegart

## Offaly

Cormac Street, Tullamore, Co Offaly  
Tel: (0579) 352971, Fax: (0579) 352973  
Email: [info@offalyceb.ie](mailto:info@offalyceb.ie)  
Website: [www.offalyceb.ie](http://www.offalyceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Sean Ryan

## Roscommon

Library Buildings, Abbey St.,  
Roscommon Town, Co. Roscommon.  
Tel: (0906) 626263, Fax: (0906) 625474  
Email: [ceb@roscommon.ie](mailto:ceb@roscommon.ie)  
Website: [www.roscommon.ie](http://www.roscommon.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Ann Flynn

## Sligo

Sligo Development Centre, Cleveragh  
Road, Sligo  
Tel: (071) 9144779, Fax: (071) 9146793  
Email: [info@sligoenterprise.ie](mailto:info@sligoenterprise.ie)  
Website: [www.sligoenterprise.ie](http://www.sligoenterprise.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: John Reilly

## Tipperary NR

Connolly Street, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

Tel: (067) 33086, Fax: (067) 33605  
Email: [info@tnceb.ie](mailto:info@tnceb.ie) Website: [www.tnceb.ie](http://www.tnceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Rita Guinan

## Tipperary SR

1 Gladstone St, Clonmel, Co Tipperary.  
Tel: (052) 29466, Fax: (052) 26512  
Email: [ceb@southtippcoco.ie](mailto:ceb@southtippcoco.ie)  
Website: [www.southtippcceb.ie](http://www.southtippcceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Thomas Hayes

## Waterford City

Enterprise House, New Street Court,  
New Street, Waterford.  
Tel: (051) 852883, Fax: (051) 877494  
Email: [info@waterfordceb.com](mailto:info@waterfordceb.com)  
Website: [www.waterfordceb.com](http://www.waterfordceb.com)  
Chief Executive Officer: Bill Rafter

## Waterford County

The Courthouse, Dungarvan,  
Co Waterford.  
Tel: (058) 44811, Fax: (058) 44817  
Email: [waterfordceb@cablesurf.com](mailto:waterfordceb@cablesurf.com)  
Website: [www.enterpriseboard.ie](http://www.enterpriseboard.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Gerard Enright

## Westmeath

Business Information Centre, Church  
Avenue, Mullingar, Co Westmeath  
Tel: 044 - 9349222, Fax: 044 - 9349009  
Email: [info@westmeath-enterprise.ie](mailto:info@westmeath-enterprise.ie)  
Website: [www.westmeath-enterprise.ie](http://www.westmeath-enterprise.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Christine Charlton

## Wexford

Wexford County Enterprise Board,  
Unit 1 Ardavan Business Park, Ardavan,  
Wexford.  
Tel: (053) 9122965, Fax: (053) 9124944  
Email: [info@wexfordceb.ie](mailto:info@wexfordceb.ie)  
Website: [www.wexfordceb.ie](http://www.wexfordceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Sean Mythen

## Wicklow

1 Main Street, Wicklow Town, Co Wicklow.  
Tel: (0404) 67100, Fax: (0404) 67601  
Email: [enterprise@wicklowceb.ie](mailto:enterprise@wicklowceb.ie)  
Website: [www.wicklowceb.ie](http://www.wicklowceb.ie)  
Chief Executive Officer: Sheelagh Daly

## TEAGASC

Rural Research Centre, Athenry.  
Contact: Paul McCarthy,  
Teagasc Business Start-up specialist  
Tel: 091-845845  
e-mail: [paul.mccarthy@teagasc.ie](mailto:paul.mccarthy@teagasc.ie)

Teagasc, Food Research Centre,  
Moorepark, Fermoy, Co. Cork.  
Eddie O' Neill, Food Technologist.  
Tel: 025-42234  
e-mail: [eddie.oneill@teagasc.ie](mailto:eddie.oneill@teagasc.ie)

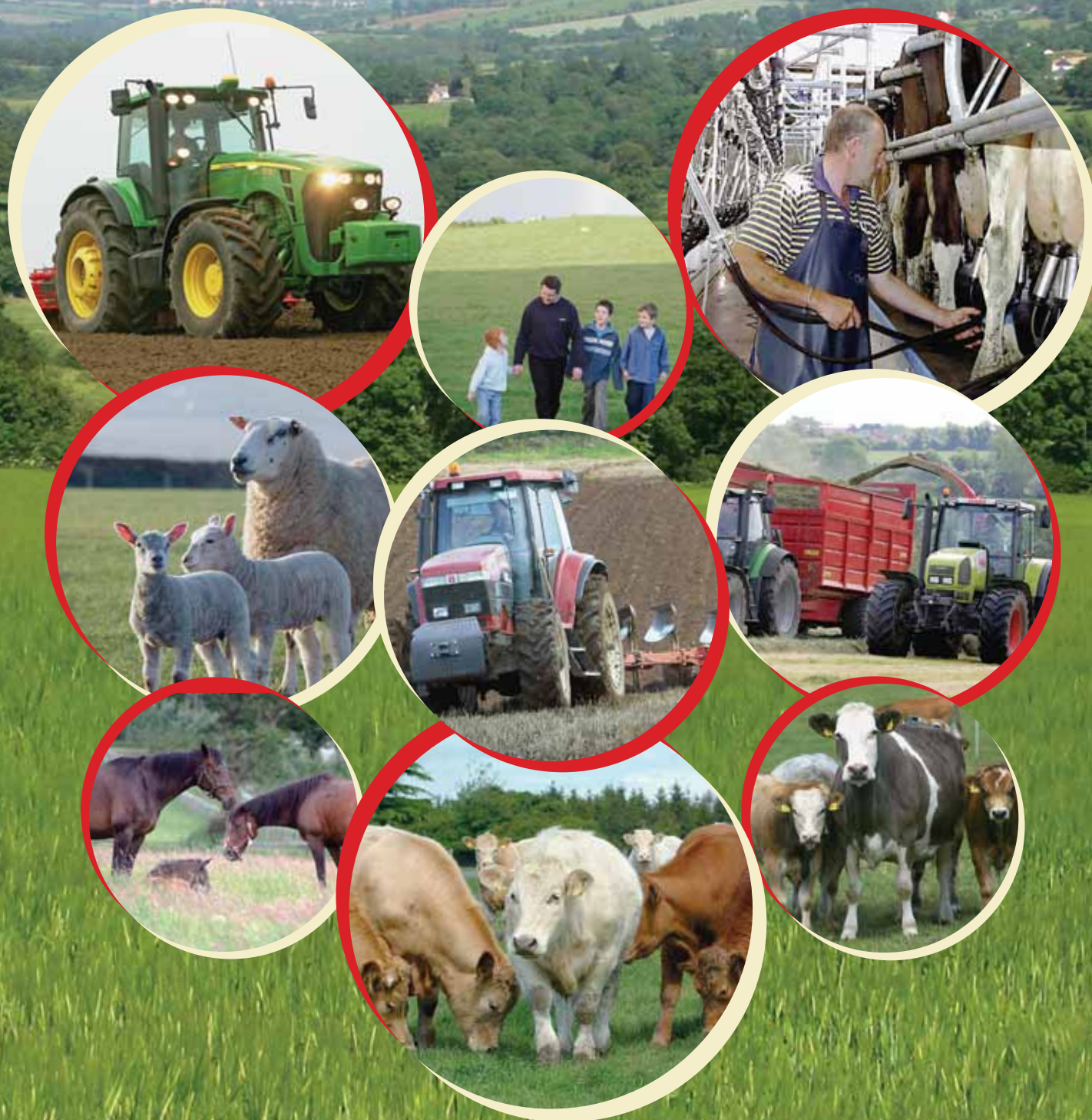


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Email: [info@farmersjournal.ie](mailto:info@farmersjournal.ie)  
Web: [www.farmersjournal.ie](http://www.farmersjournal.ie)