



Teagasc Organic Farm Walk
on the farm of
Brigid O'Connor
Gleann na Gealt, Camp,
Tralee, Co. Kerry
Wednesday 30th March 2022

Introduction

Brigid O'Connor farms 54.48Ha (135acres) of utilisable land in Gleann na Gealt, Camp, Co. Kerry The farm is primarily a hill sheep farm overlooking the scenic Tralee bay. Brigid is farming organically since 2010 and in her own words “I couldn’t be more happy and content with it and I think it’s the way to go, one hundred percent”

Brigid keeps a flock of 121 Scotch ewes, selling all lambs from late August to Christmas. Brigid also runs an on-farm tourism business called “The shepherds farm walk”, where she gives visitors a tour of her very scenic farm, inviting visitors to walk among the sheep. During the tour, Brigid entertains her visitors with tales of local folklore, points out the numerous local historical attractions and takes them back hundreds of years by explaining the history behind many of the archaeological features on her farm and in the surrounding area.



Farm Details and Land Use

The utilisable area on this farm is 54.48Ha. Of this area, 8.61Ha are lowland, predominantly native grassland species, another 26.23Ha is privately owned mountain type land and a further 19.64Ha is part of a commonage of which Brigid has a 50% share. The total commonage area is 39.52Ha.

Table 1 - Land Farmed (forage area only) 2021

Land Status	Area (forage)
Privately owned (Lowland)	8.61 ha (21 acres)
Privately owned (Upland)	26.23 ha (65 acres)
Commonage 50% Share (Upland)	19.64ha (49 acres)



Sheep Enterprise

As sheep are outwintered on this farm, Brigid maintains a relatively low stocking rate of 0.5LU/Ha on this farm to avoid over grazing the uplands areas of the farm.

Table 2 - Average Livestock Numbers 2021

Animal Type	2021
Ewes	121
Rams	2
Total LU	18.45LUs
Total Ha	54.48Ha
Stocking Rate	0.34LU/Ha

Breeding Strategy

Brigid has opted to breed her ewes to Scotch rams as she feel they are well suited to grazing the upland areas around Kerry. Availability of Scotch rams in Ireland is quite limited and Brigid usually sources rams from Northern Ireland. Brigid finds the Scotch breed to be very hardy and low maintenance requiring minimal veterinary inputs. The rams run with the ewes from November 1st to mid – March.



Management of Ewes

- Rams are introduced the first week of November and remain with ewes until Mid-March
- Ewes are outwintered, with no housing facilities on the farm.
- Ewes are sheared the first week of July
- Ewes are feed small amounts of an Oat/Pea/Barley mix from January until lambing
- Lambing starts in early April
- Lambs are sold from late August onwards

Lamb Sales

Lambs are sold through a number of outlets including Manna Organic food store in Tralee, to a local butcher and at the Camp fair, which is held in mid-September annually. Brigid will advertise this sale via the Organic Trust website and also by placing adverts in the Kerry Eye newspaper.



Collaboration Ideas

Brigid is a strong believer that there is a huge opportunity for organic farmers to come together to sell their produce collectively. She believes the many restaurants and shops in Co. Kerry would be willing to pay a premium for organic Kerry lamb. Individually, most farmers do not have enough scale to make it viable for a local butcher/abattoir to process organic lamb. Bringing farmers together would overcome this obstacle.

Bio-districts are one such mechanism that have been used to great effect in mainland Europe, especially Italy, to overcome this type of challenge. If any farmers or other stakeholders, are interested in developing this idea further we would ask that they email an expression of interest to Brigid at brigid.oconnor@yahoo.com or Joe Kelleher at joe.kelleher@teagasc.ie





Bio-Districts

A bio-district is a geographical area where farmers, citizens, tourist operators, associations and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic production and consumption (short food chain, purchasing groups, organic canteens in public offices and schools). In bio-districts, the promotion of organic produce is inextricably linked with the promotion of the land and its special characteristics so that it can fully realise its economic, social and cultural potential.

(Source: Beyond agriculture: Bio-districts, Yulia Barabanova)

Bio districts have proven successful in integrating organic farming and local activities to enhance local tourism including in less touristic areas. They reinforce local and small volume processing and foster short trade circuits including organic production and foster rural vitality.

The creation of Bio districts which include lifestyle, nutrition, human and nature considerations, has positive results for local organic production and is much appreciated by consumers. They give a specific identity to a geographical area.

In line with Action 14 of the Action Plan for the development of organic production, Member States are encouraged to support the development of ‘*bio districts*’. In addition, the current and next programming of the rural development gives the possibility to fund some measures helping the creation of ‘bio districts’.

<https://www.ecoregion.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/stories-from-all-corners-SEGES16.pdf>

The Shepherds Farm Walk

Brigid runs an on-farm tourism venture whereby she gives visitors a tour of her farm whilst enlightening them with local history, archaeology, biodiversity and mythology. The tour is called “The Shepherds Farm Walk”. The guided tour lasts 2 hours and Brigid takes all bookings via the Airbnb website.

[Shepherds Farm Walk- Dingle Peninsula - Airbnb](#)

Brigid believes there is a very strong demand from tourists “to see the real Ireland” and she has a very strong demand for her tours. Prior to Covid 19, she used do farmhouse stays and she may look at re-commencing this also in the coming months.

On the tour of the farm, visitors will be told about how Gleanna Gealt translates into “The glen of the mad”, they will see standing stones that are 5,000 years old, will hear the history of the nearby West Kerry railway, will hear old saying such as “another day on the cipín”, and will hear about the rare flowers such as the Kerry violet and the visiting Artic thrushes. It really is a unique experience in the company of a wonderful story teller.





Rural Tourism

Traditionally agriculture was central to rural life and the main source of income within the rural economy. Farming had a powerful influence on traditions, power structures and lifestyles, determining rural land use and the landscape.

At present, rural areas are experiencing huge changes and challenges to this traditional way of life, as land-based occupations are in decline and younger rural residents are migrating to cities for work, as well as for social and cultural opportunities.

Rural tourism offers a possible solution to some of the problems associated with the lost economic opportunities and population decline that accompany these challenges. Many farmers and rural dwellers have embraced rural tourism as an opportunity to bring in ‘new money’ to rural areas, stimulating growth, providing employment opportunities and attempting to halt rural decline.

Rural tourism offers many opportunities including the provision of accommodation, recreational activities, rural amenities, a chance to showcase local culture and heritage, and interesting countryside pursuits. Rural communities have the resources and are well-placed to capitalise on the move away from mass tourism products to fulfil the tourist’s desire for the more niche-type holidays which can be found in rural areas.

<https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2016/Rural-Tourism-Booklet.pdf>



Financial Performance

The priority on this farm is maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity levels on this farm. The tourism offers an excellent revenue generating enterprise that also affords Brigid the opportunity to capitalise on the scenic landscape of the farm and her outgoing and affable personality, also complement this enterprise. The extensive nature of the farming system enables Brigid to take advantage of the many Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine led schemes that are available including the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Area of Natural Constraints (ANC), Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) and Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) which reward Brigid for farming in an extensive manner.

The target on this farm is to produce a ewe per lamb. In 2020 lambs were 25-30kgs liveweight at sale and averaged €65 each. Bridget's costs are minimal and she spends approximately €1,000 on feed and mineral licks. These are her two main variable costs.

The direct payments make up a large portion of the income generated on this farm. Recent changes to the OFS scheme have also benefitted Brigid. Reducing the minimum stocking rate from 0.5LU/Ha to 0.15Ha will increase Brigid's OFS payment from €4,027 annually to €5,923.

Animal Health

There is minimal veterinary intervention on this farm and much of this is due to breed selection but also to Brigid's management practices;

- Brigid rotates the sheep around the farm and gives fields a 5 week rest period between grazings to avoid a build-up of ticks
- Ewes are given access to mineral blocks containing garlic and Brigid feels these are excellent at repelling various insects
- There are very few instances of fly-strike and there is no routine dosing carried out on this farm. If a ewe has a dirty tail, then Brigid will get permission from her vet to treat that individual animal
- It is very rare that an animal will require an antibiotic with the exception of an individual case at lambing
- Foxes can be an issue at lambing, but Brigid has sources "fox lamps" from Australia and finds these excellent at deterring foxes, see photo below.





Livestock Health

- A healthy herd in organic farming is achieved by a combination of good management, sound nutrition and good animal husbandry skills.
- When a farm undergoes conversion to organic status an Animal Health Plan is required to be drawn up by the veterinary practitioner, who specifies the current animal health issues on the farm and how the farmer will tackle these problems into the future, while conforming to the requirements of organic certification standards.
- Detection of problems needs to be early, and timely veterinary advice is invaluable – when an animal is ill the organic farmer reacts in the same manner as their conventional neighbour and veterinary assistance is required immediately

Conventional Veterinary Treatments Permitted

- Animals for meat consumption: 1 course antibiotics within 12 months.
- Animals for breeding: 2 courses antibiotics within 12 months.
- Dairy Mastitis: 2 courses antibiotics within 12 months, otherwise the cow is removed from the milking herd.
- If limits exceeded, organic status is taken away from animal.

Withdrawal Periods for use of Veterinary Products

- All withdrawal periods shall be doubled and shall not be less than;
 - 14 days for milk
 - 56 days for meat from poultry and mammals including fat and offal

Restricted Veterinary Practices

Procedures for which derogation must be sought:

- Dehorning
 - -Disbudding
 - -Castration
 - -Tail docking/use of rubber rings for lambs
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- Prior approval is required from your Organic Certification Body before any of these practices are undertaken.
 - To avoid suffering to the animal adequate anaesthesia and/or analgesia must be administered in all cases.





Organic Animal Housing Standards

- Adjustments to meet organic standards may be necessary – depends on farm situation.
- Housing is not compulsory.
- At least 50% of floor area must be bedded.
- Straw, rushes or untreated wood shavings are acceptable bedding materials and these need not be organic.
- All animal housing is subject to inspection and approval by the Organic Certification Body.
- See Table 8 for organic space requirements.
- Cubicles are permitted if they are of optimum size for the animals on the holding. At least 3m² per individual animal must be allowed for dairy cows.
- Cubicles must be clean and dry and bedded at all times

Table 3 - Minimum Housing Area per head and by weight

Animal	Minimum Indoor Areas (net area available to each animal)	
	Live-weight Minimum (kg)	m ² /head
Calves; Beef Cattle; Bull Beef;	Up to 100kg	1.5
	Up to 200kg	2.5
	Up to 350kg	4.0
	Over 350kg	5.0 with a minimum of 1m ² / 100kg
Dairy Cows		6.0
Breeding Bulls		10m ²
Sheep		1.5m ² per ewe 0.35m ² per lamb

Soil Nutrients and Manure Management

- The aim of organic farming is to maintain soil fertility levels by efficient recycling of farmyard manure, slurry and or compost that is normally generated on the farm.
- Management of organic farms should ensure regular inputs of manures and a level of microbial and earthworm activity sufficient to breakdown organic matter and ensure continuous and efficient nutrient cycling.
- Keeping soils at a pH that facilitates organic matter breakdown and nutrient recycling is essential for successful organic farming.
- The table below outlines the soil fertility on this farm. As the soils on this farm are peat based soils, it would not be recommended to increase pH on these soils and likewise, peat soils find it difficult to bind with Phosphorus, therefore it would not be recommended to build Phosphorus levels on peat based soils. It should be noted that these samples only apply to the lowland areas of the farm.

Table 4- Soil sample results – Brigid O'Connor's farm



Sustainable Upland Management 1

Why?

Uplands are important for:

- farming
- carbon sequestration
- recreation
- tourism
- flood attenuation
- biodiversity



Upland Flora and Fauna



Hen Harrier - nests in hollows in the ground, protected by tall vegetation



Red Grouse - nests, shelters and feeds on heather



Marsh fritillary butterfly



Emperor moth



Emperor moth caterpillar



Bog cotton



Lichen



Antler moth

Sustainable Upland Management 2

Undergrazing:

- Strong heather
- Scrub



Overgrazing:

- Peat erosion
- Loss of species



**Sustainable
Grazing**



Sustainable Stocking Rates



Habitat Type (Undamaged)	Stocking Rate: Ewe Equivalents / ha
Upland Grassland	1.5 - 5
Dry Heath	1 – 1.5
Wet Heath	0.75 - 1
Blanket Bog	0 – 0.75

Sustainable Upland Management 3

Upland Habitats

Upland Grassland



Mat-grass



Sweet
vernal-grass



Common bent

- ❖ **Dominated by low-growing grasses**
- ❖ **If undergrazed:**
 - Bracken
 - Gorse / whins / furze

Dry Heath



Calluna
ling heather



Bell heather



Bilberry

- ❖ **Peat depth < 15cm**
- ❖ **Species poor**
- ❖ **Ling and bell heather dominate**
- ❖ **If overgrazed**
 - Heather disappears

Wet Heath



Purple
moor-grass



Deergass



Cross-leaved
heath

- ❖ **Peat depth: 15 - 80cm**
- ❖ **If overgrazed**
 - Slow to recover
 - Erosion of peat
 - Mat-grass / purple moor-grass monoculture

Blanket Bog



Bog asphodel



Sphagnum
mosses



Sundew

- ❖ **Peat depth > 80cm**
- ❖ **If overgrazed:**
 - Peat layer eroded

The Kerry Violet

Greater Butterwort (Pinguicula grandiflora)

One of the many species of flora that can be found on Brigid O'Connor's farm is the Kerry Violet. "The Greater Butterwort (*pinguicula grandiflora*) has been described by many botanists as 'the most beautiful flower member of the Irish flora' and is special to Kerry's bogs and moorland. The stems grow to about six inches and produce deep purple flowers. A special feature of this plant is that it compensates for the lack of nitrogen in the moorland soil by trapping insects and digesting insects in its sticky leaves." <https://www.kerrygems.com/flora/>






Organic Myth Busters

There are many myths circulating in relation to organic farming and many of these are often cited as reasons why farmers chose not to convert their farms to organic farming methods. Below we attempt to dispel some of these myths.

- 1. I will have to sell my herd/flock if I convert to organic farming;** No you don't. You can keep your existing herd/flock while converting. These animals will never achieve organic status but their progeny and produce can be sold as organic once the herd/flock undergoes the required conversion period.
- 2. I can't join the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) because I farm commonage land:** Yes you can. Under current OFS rules you cannot get paid on commonage lands but you can still join the scheme and get paid on your privately owned land. If you are a sheep farmer, you can continue to graze the commonage once you can guarantee your flock is a "hefted flock" and that they do not mix with another flock on the commonage.
- 3. I will not be allowed to use any veterinary products;** The welfare of the animal is one of the core principles of organic farming. If an animal needs treatment and the vet prescribes a certain product, then that product can be used. Longer withdrawal periods are adhered to.
- 4. I cannot outwinter stock under the Organic Farming Scheme;** Outwintering is permitted under the OFS scheme as long as cross compliance rules are adhered to including a maximum stocking rate of 1LU/Ha and excessive poaching must be avoided.

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5. **I cannot spread bagged fertiliser while farming organically:** You cannot spread any chemical fertilisers. Certain products such as ground rock phosphate and certain organic Potassium fertilisers are permitted.
 6. **I cannot import any organic fertilisers while farming organically;** Certain organic manures can be imported on to organic farms including cattle slurry and FYM from conventional farms (excluding intensive indoor systems). Poultry manure from free range farms and dairy sludge from organic approved processors can also be imported. Poultry manure from fully indoor systems and pig slurry cannot be imported.
 7. **I cannot spread lime on my organic farms:** Ground limestone is a natural produced product and is permitted to be spread on organic farms.
 8. **I can continue to feed conventional feed while farming organically:** Once you convert to organic farming, you must feed organically produced feed to your animals. There are certain situations where you may be permitted to feed conventional (non-GMO) feed for the first 18 months of the conversion period.
 9. **I cannot buy in conventional bulls/rams;** It is permitted to purchase conventional bulls and rams under the organic farming scheme.
 10. **I must purchase organic straw for bedding my animals:** Conventional straw can be purchased for bedding purposes. If you intend feeding straw, this must be organic.



Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)

The Organic Farming scheme opened on February 9th 2022 for new applications and it will close on April 8th 2022.

Rule Changes

There are two new rule changes introduced for the 2022 scheme;

- Full OFS payment increased from 60ha to 70ha
- Reduction in Stocking Density to receive full payment – 0.5 LU/Ha to 0.15 LU/Ha

Payment Rates for Livestock Farmers

Organic Status	Farmed Area of >3Ha up to 70Ha	Farmed Area >70Ha
In conversion	€220/Ha	€60/HA
Full Organic Status	€170/Ha	€30/HA

How to apply

- Contact one of the Organic certification bodies to get licenced as an organic producer
- Submit online application via Agfood before April 8th 2022
- Make changes to your BPS application before May 16th 2022
- Complete 25 hour QQI approved Organic Farming Principles course before November 1st 2022

Further Information

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/d46aec-organic-farming-scheme/>

<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/>



Organic Certification

A major factor that distinguishes organic farming from other approaches to sustainable farming is the existence of internationally acknowledged standards and certification procedures. The standards for organic production within the European Union are defined and enshrined in law by Council Regulation EC 834/2007 as amended.

In Ireland the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the competent authority (i.e. - the Department's Organic Unit is based at Johnstown Castle Estate Wexford) for regulating the organic sector and ensuring that the obligations and requirements of Council Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007 as amended and adhered to.

The Organic Unit of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have designated Official Certification Bodies whose role is to certify organic producers, farmers and processors through and inspection process of each individual's unit or farm. Further information can be sourced from these organic certification bodies:

Irish Organic Association



- Based in Unit 13 Inish Carraig, Golden Island, Athlone, Co. Westmeath,
- Phone: 090 643 3680
- Email: info@irishoa.ie
- Website: www.irishorganicassociation.ie

Organic Trust



- Based in Unit M4, Naas Town Centre, Dublin Road, Co. Kildare, W91 F7X3.
- Tel: 045 882377
- Email: info@organictrust.ie
- Website: www.organictrust.ie



Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme Organic Capital Investment Scheme (OCIS)

On Farm Scheme

A standard rate of aid of 40% on investments up to a ceiling of €80,000 (i.e. can generate a grant of €32,000 from an investment of €80,000). For qualifying young organic farmers who meet the specific eligibility criteria, the standard rate of aid is 60% on investments up to a ceiling of €80,000.

How to Apply and Closing Date:

Online applications only through www.agfood.ie facility.

Full details and T&C:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/organicfarming/organicsscheme/organiccapitalinvestmentschemeocis/>

Queries:

DAFM Organic Unit, Johnstown Castle: (053) 91 63400

Organic Processing Scheme

Grant aid of up to 40% on €1.75 million (i.e. can generate a grant of €700,000 for an investment of €1.75 million) in facilities for the processing, preparation, grading, packing and storage of organic products with minimum level of investment in excess of €3,000.

More Details:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/press/pressreleases/2015/august/title,84203.en.html>

Queries:

DAFM Organic Unit, Johnstown Castle: (053) 91 63400

Organic Farm Walks 2022

Teagasc, Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine and organic organisations invite all farmers and members of the public to see organic farming in practice and to meet and speak with the producers and sector's experts.

Wednesday, 2nd March | 12pm

Seamus Howard, Gortiecka,
Kilnaboy, Ennis, Co. Clare
Dairy

Wednesday, 30th March | 12pm

Brigid O'Connor, Gleann na
Gealt, Camp, Tralee, Co. Kerry
Hill Sheep, Agri - Tourism

Wednesday, 20th April | 12pm

Ross & Amy Jackson, Lacka,
Carrig, Birr, Co Tipperary
Cereals, Sheep

Wednesday, 11th May | 12pm

Andrew & Leonie Workman, Dunany
Flour Organic, Drogheda, Co Louth
Cereals, Milling Flour

Wednesday, 25th May | 2pm

Mark & Grainne Duffy,
Clogher, Ballybay, Co. Monaghan
Poultry-eggs, Cereals, Beef Finishing

Wednesday, 1st June | 2pm

John Hurley, Castle Hill House,
Knockalaughta, Ballintubber,
Castlereagh, Co Roscommon
Suckler to Weanling, Sheep

Wednesday, 8th June | 2pm

Fergal Byrne, Calverstown
Little, Dunlavin, Co Kildare
Sheep, Cereals, Beef Finishing

Wednesday, 15th June | 2pm

Donal & Frederique Keane, Camelton
Stud, Summerhill, Co Meath
Suckler to Beef, Cereal

Wednesday, 22nd June | 2pm

Clive Bright, Ardsallagh,
Ballymote, Co. Sligo
Beef, Direct Selling

Wednesday, 6th July | 2pm

Gavin Tully, Clonhenritte,
Camolin, Enniscorthy, Co Wexford
Cereals

Wednesday, 13th July | 2pm

Declan Houlihan, Corrigeen Organic
Farm, Rathcabin, Birr, Co Offaly
Cereals, Poultry-eggs

Tuesday, 19th July | 2pm

Rose O Sullivan & Martin Fox,
Spring Cottage Organic Farm, Parke,
Kinnegad, Co Westmeath
**Fieldscale Vegetables, Protected
Cropping, Cereals, Poultry-eggs,
Direct Selling**

Scan the QR code
to book your ticket!

