



Teagasc Organic Farm Walk
on the farm of
John Hurley,
Castle Hill House,
Ballintubber , Co Roscommon
Wednesday 1st June 2022





Introduction

Welcome to the Hurley family farm.

Before going organic, the Hurley family had been eating organic food for many years. They realised the 'benefits of organic food for human health as for the earth'. At the time, they kept 58 suckler cows and had 'a massive feed and fertiliser bill'. They felt 'production costs were too high' and the numbers of stock were not sustainable.

After careful consideration, the farm entered conversion in 2015 with full organic status for the land and produce being achieved in 2017.

On the farm today, there is a suckler herd of 23 cows with weanlings sold in autumn. There is also a sheep enterprise of 100 ewes.

Farm Profile

- Farmed area 39.6 hectares
- Mainly free-draining land.
- 100 breeding ewes
- 23 suckler cows
- Farming organically since 2015

Land Details

The holding is made up of two blocks of land, which is divided by a public roadway all of which is owned. The area farmed is 39.6 hectares

Figure 1: Land Use Details

	Hectares
Grazing	24.3
Silage	12.1
Hay	3.2



Suckler cow and calf



Suckler Enterprise

The suckler herd is made up of LimousineX and Belgian BlueX cows. The stock bull on the farm is a Belgian Blue and AI is also used (Charollais).

Most of the calving takes place in January-February with some autumn calvers.

Weanlings are sold from August (those born the previous autumn) to October (born in spring)

Figure 2: Livestock Performance

Calving Interval	368 days
Calves/cow/year	0.97
ADG	2.06kg/day

Source ICBF

The Hurley's place a big emphasis on genetics to breed high genetic merit replacements as well as aiming to breed U+ grade weanlings.

The aims are as follows:

- Cow to calve every year
- Produce quality weanlings from milk
- Go back in calf easily

When selecting replacement heifers they use the Eurostar replacement index paying attention on milk, docility as well as carcass weight when making their decision.

They also use the Eurostar index when purchasing replacement bulls and when selecting AI bulls. The following are the specific traits that the Hurley's look at:

- Dual purpose bull with 5* on the terminal and maternal side
- A low calving difficulty %
- Growth rate characteristics



Replacements on the farm



Sheep Enterprise

The ewe flock is made up approximately 70 Rouge de Louest x Charollais ewes and the rest are Rouge de L'ouest x Texel. There are three rams on the farm 2 5* pure bred Charollais and 1 5* pure bred Rouge de L'ouest for keeping replacements

The Hurley's breed all their own replacements. Their aim is to produce prolific replacements by selecting lambs from top quality dams matched with a top quality 5* ram.

Their criteria used when selecting replacements includes

- Quantity of milk
- Mothering ability
- Lambs born without assistance

Three groups of ewes are run during the breeding season. One group with the maternal ram and the others with the terminal rams to produce lambs for slaughter.

Rams are selected based on their pedigree and physical attributes.

The Hurley's pay attention to the rams genetic index and always opt for a 5* pedigree ram with a high reliability in his genetic index. In doing this they believe that this will result in a higher scanning rate and better growth rates.

Figure 3: Lambing Details & Performance 2021

Lambing start date	1 st February
Lambs /ewe	1.7
First lambs slaughtered	25 th April
Average liveweight of lambs finished	40kg
Assuming 51% KO	20.5kg carcass



Finished Lambs



Livestock Health in Organic Farming

- 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

Animal Health on the Farm

The switch to organics has not lead to any adverse effects with regard to animal health on the farm.

- A closed sheep flock is operated as much as is possible to help minimise disease risks.
- Faecal analyses are taken to assess the level and identify the type of internal parasites if present.



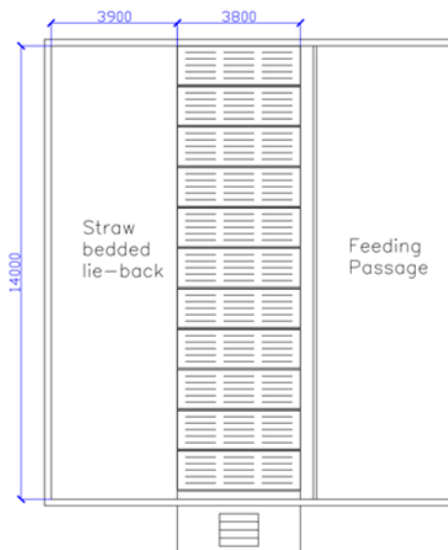
Organic Animal Housing Standards

- 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 Figure 4 for organic space requirements.

Figure 4: Indoor area (net area available to animals)

Animal	Minimum Indoor Areas (net area available to each animal)	
	Live-weight Minimum (kg)	m ² /head
Bovine animals	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
Bulls for breeding		10m ²
Sheep		1.5m ² per ewe 0.35m ² per lamb

Fig 5: Floor plan of Hurley's slatted/straw bedded shed



Calculating the stock carrying capacity of your shed

Conversion of animal housing to become compliant with the organic standards can be one of the major tasks drystock farmers have to undertake. To calculate the stock carrying capacity of your shed, you will need three figures;

1. The total indoor area of the shed
2. The lying area in the shed
3. The area required for each animal to be housed

In John Hurley's situation, if we assume that the existing shed is to house suckler cows weighing 600kgs, then these 3 figures are;

1. Total indoor area = 107.80 m^2 (14.0×7.7)
2. Lying area = 54.6 m^2 (14.0×3.9)
3. Total area required for a suckler cow = 6 m^2

With the above figures at hand, we can then easily calculate that John's house can accommodate 18 suckler cows ($54.6 / 3$)

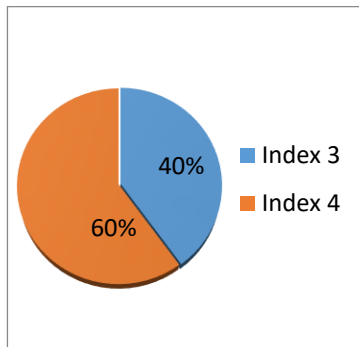
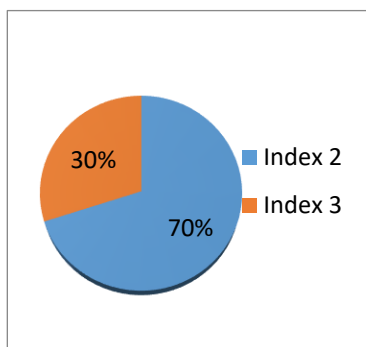
Soil Fertility on the Farm

The whole farm was recently soil sampled as part of the DAFM Pilot Soil Sampling Programme 2021.

- Soil fertility is good on the farm.
- The soil pH on the farm ranges from 6.3 to 7.2
- Outlined below is an overview of the soil Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K) levels on the farm,

Soil Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K) Levels on the Hurley Farm

Fig 6: P Index Levels on farm Fig 7: K Index Levels on farm



Slurry is spread in spring. The farmyard manure is spread in autumn. The Hurley's also use bioinoculants including biostimulant pelleted fertilisers for the land and biostimulant additives for the slurry and farmyard manure.



Sources of Organic Manures that are permitted to be imported onto Organic Farm

- Imported farmyard manure or slurry must come from stock that have been outside during the year, not from intensive pig and poultry units where animals are inside all the time or from zero grazing farming systems. Farmyard manure must be composted for at least 3 months before it can be land spread.
- Dairy processing sludge is available from some dairy processors who have sludge registered with an Organic Certification Body.

Grazing, Fodder and Feed

The grazing on the farm is managed by using a rotational grazing system.

The plan is to finish lambs early to allow more grazing for the cattle.

30 acres is cut for silage and 8 acres of hay is made. This produces 250 bales of silage and 60 bales of hay. Silage fields are rotated.

In 2021, an organic ration was fed to the weanlings. In addition, the ewes were fed an organic nut for 60 days and the lambs. There is no ration fed over the winter.



Financial Performance

Table 1 – John Hurley’s financial performance 2021 versus NFS 2020 (30-50Ha Cattle rearing farmer category)

	NFS 2020 (/Ha)	J Hurley 2021 (/Ha)
Land (Ha) UAA	38.2	39.7
Suckler Cows	28.8	21.5
Total Livestock Units	45.8	40.95
Stocking Rate	1.20	1.03
Gross Output	€761	€1070
Purchased Concentrate	€111	€139
Fertiliser/Soil conditioner	€81	€89
Contractor	€95	€172
Livestock (Vet, A.I., etc)	€75	€48
Other variable costs	€63	€51
Total Variable Costs	€425	€498
Gross Margin	€337	€571
Organic Farming Scheme payment	€0	€170
Gross Margin (incl OFS)	€337	€741

Overall the Hurley’s believe that a combination of ‘genetics, grassland management and an excellent health programme are key to a profitable sheep and beef enterprise’



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Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Organic Certification in Ireland

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



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Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme Organic Capital Investment 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:

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: organic@agriculture.gov.ie

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: organic@agriculture.gov.ie



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Organic Farming Scheme 2022

PRESENTLY CLOSED

The DAFM Organic Farming scheme opened on February 9th 2022 for new applications and closed on April 22nd 2022.

Payment Rates for Livestock Holdings

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

Further Information

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

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



Organic Farming

Steps to Organic Conversion

Step 1 - Consider

- Could you farm without chemical fertilisers or pesticides?
- Can you modify your animal housing to incorporate a bedded lying area?
- Have you a source of farmyard manure/slurry/compost?

Step 2 - Investigate

- Talk to existing organic farmers
- Consult your farm advisor
- Attend farm walks/open days
- Familiarise yourself with the organic farming standards

Step 3 - Choose an OCB

- Choose an Organic Certification Body
- Irish Organic Association
- Organic Trust
- Complete a Conversion Plan
- Register as an organic operator

Step 4 - OFS

- Organic Farming Scheme
- Scheme opens regularly
- Attractive premiums available
- Apply online via [Agfood](https://www.agfood.ie)
- Consult your farm advisor
- Change status of land parcels on BPS

Step 5 - Training Course

- QQI Principles of Organic Farming
- 25 hour course
- Blended course - online & farm visit
- Register at www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/training

Step 6 - Conversion Period

- Normally 2 years – allows time for land to adjust
- Must adhere to organic standards
- Can sell produce as organic once conversion period completed



Teagasc Organic Farm Walk





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Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



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, 1st June | 2pm

John Hurley, Castle Hill House,
Knockalaughta, Ballintubber,
Castlerea, 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, Cereals

Wednesday, 22nd June | 2pm

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

Wednesday, 29th June | 2pm

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

Wednesday, 6th July | 2pm

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

Wednesday, 13th July | 2pm

Dedan 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 a ticket!

