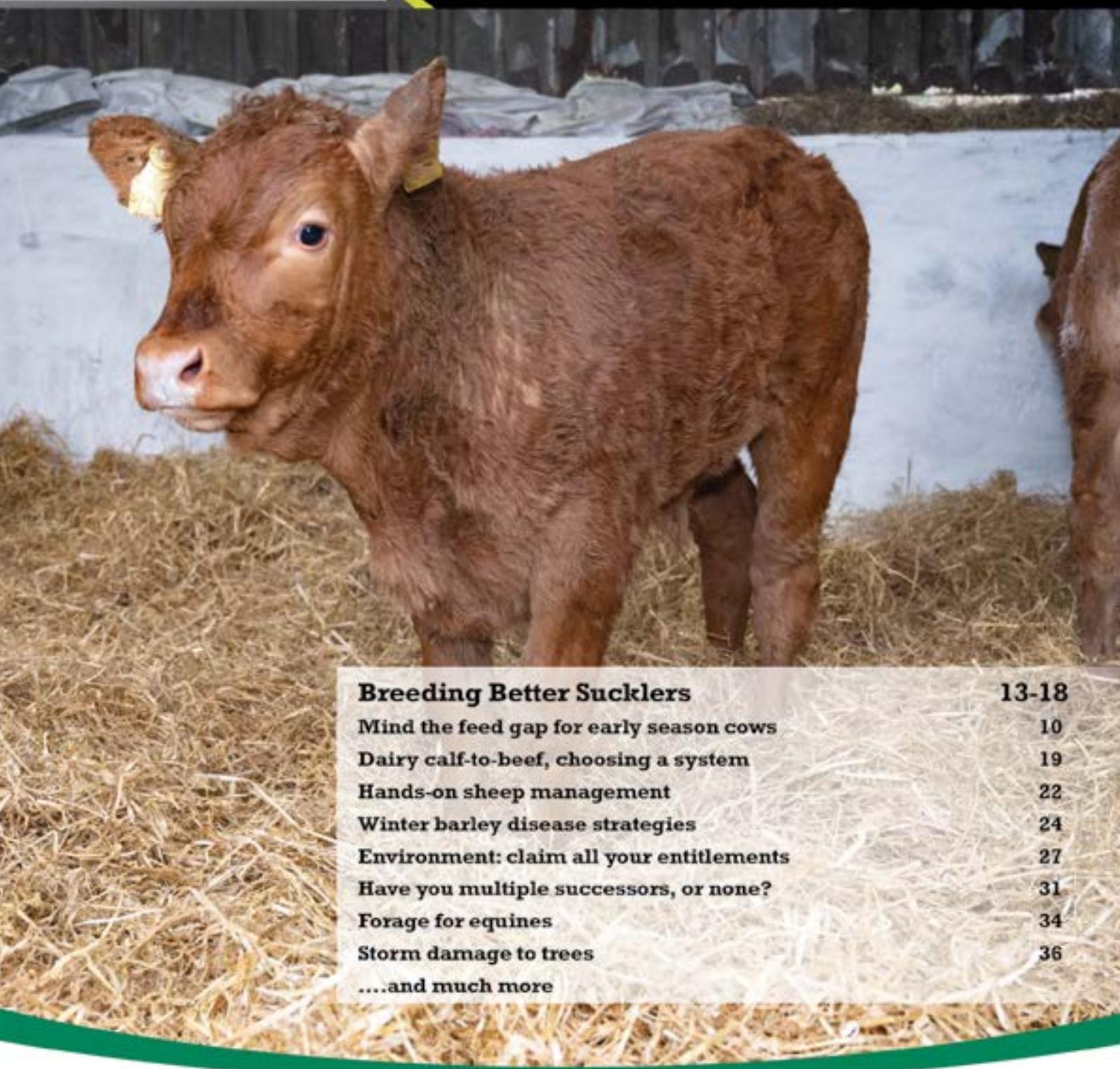




# Today's Farm

Business, production, environment and countryside issues [www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie)



<b>Breeding Better Sucklers</b>	<b>13-18</b>
Mind the feed gap for early season cows	10
Dairy calf-to-beef, choosing a system	19
Hands-on sheep management	22
Winter barley disease strategies	24
Environment: claim all your entitlements	27
Have you multiple successors, or none?	31
Forage for equines	34
Storm damage to trees	36
....and much more	

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# contents

## Events

4....Agricultural College open days nationwide

## Farm buildings

6....TAMS changes explained – the revised grant ceilings

## Dairying

10...Mind the energy gap

## Beef

13...Artificial insemination in the suckler beef herd

15...AI results in the Derrypatrick herd

19...How to build the best dairy calf-to-beef system for your farm

## Sheep

22...The hands-on approach to ewe body condition

## Tillage

24...Controlling disease in winter barley

## Farm schemes

27...Cutting farm emissions: know your entitlements

## Environment

29...Managing hedges is vital for our birdlife

## Succession

32...Managing multiple successors

## Equine

34...Forage for equines

## Forestry

36...Staying calm after the storm

## Botanics

38...Elbow grease and patience – sprucing up your paving

## Comment

### Mark Moore

Editor, Today's Farm

## Beware of the bull

I am in no way nervous about being around livestock and I know any bull or newly calved cow represents a risk. But I was astonished recently when viewing a relatively young bull of circa twenty four months.

In a fit of playfulness the animal started 'larking around'. Pure muscle, the ease, speed and dexterity with which the animal could move its considerable weight was a revelation. The genetic benefits of using AI in sucklers are compelling as we argue in our cover story. Increased farm safety is a useful bonus.

## Fainic an tarbh

Ní bhímse ar tinneall agus mé timpeall ar bheostoc, cé gurfeasach dom go bhféadfadh tarbh nó bó nuabheirthe a bheith ina mbaol don bheatha. Ach baineadh siar asam le deireanas nuair a bhí mé ag amharc ar tharbh cuibheasach óg timpeall ar dhá bhliain d'aois.

Chuaigh an t-ainmhí i mbun pléaráca agus é ag 'pocléim thart'. Ba dhíol suntais dom a láidre, a thapúla, a éasca, agus a lúfaire a ghluais an t-ainmhí a mheáchan os cionn leath-thona. Is réiteach deas iad na tairbh stoic chun dáir a bhrath, ach is cuid den chostas é an riosca a bhaineann leo.



West Clare beef farmer Conor Whelan pictured with (left) Teagasc advisor Niall Lynch. Conor is one of the farmers featured in a special report on the benefits of artificial insemination for suckler beef breeding. See pages 13-18.

Today's Farm is a bi-monthly publication produced in a joint venture between Teagasc and the Agricultural Trust, publishers of the *Irish Farmers Journal* and *The Irish Field*.

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All editorial enquiries to: Teagasc, Oak Park, Carlow  
Tel: (059) 917 0200 Fax: (059) 9183498  
e-mail: mark.moore@teagasc.ie | web: www.teagasc.ie

All advertising enquiries to: Paul O'Grady, Think Media  
The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1, D01V822  
Tel: 01-856-1166/086-246 8382

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Cover: Using AI on suckler cows offers farmers access to a wide range of sires and the possibility to use genetics tailored to each dam's needs. We met part-time farmers right across the country who use AI on their herds. Photo: Clive Wasson



Visitors to Teagasc College Open Days will get a flavour of how courses are delivered.

# Agricultural College open days nationwide

**T**eagasc and the independent colleges are holding a series of events for prospective applicants to full-time Level 5 agriculture, horticulture, equine and forestry courses.

Attendees will have the opportunity to learn about the courses available and get the chance to meet teaching staff, educational experts, current students and potential employers of course graduates. Attendees will also be given a guided tour of the facilities.

Topics to be discussed at the open days include:

- course application process
- course content and elective subjects
- progression
- student maintenance grants
- work experience arrangements.

---

## FRIDAY 7 MARCH 2025

---

### Gurteen College Open Day Venue

- **Venue:** Gurteen College, Ballingarry, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. Eircode: E53 TP93
- **Event Time:** 10:30am to 12:30pm | Tours on-going

### Teagasc Kildalton College Open Day

- **Venue:** Teagasc Kildalton College, Piltown, Co. Kilkenny. Eircode: E32 YW08.
- **Event Time:** Tours start at 10am & 11am

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## TUESDAY, 11 MARCH 2025

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### Let's Talk Equine - Demystifying Bone Chips

- **Venue:** Online
- **Event Time:** 8:30pm

---

## WEDNESDAY, 12 MARCH 2025

---

### Spring Pasture Morning - Cork

- **Venue:** Farm of John & Eileen O'Callaghan, Monee, Mourneabbey, Co. Cork. Eircode: P51 PY79.
- **Event Time:** 11am Friday, 14 March 2025

### Teagasc Ballyhaise Agricultural College Open Day Venue: Teagasc Ballyhaise Agricultural College, Ballyhaise, Co. Cavan. Eircode: H12 E392

- **Event Time:** 9:30am to 1pm | Advance Booking is Essential

THURSDAY, 20 MARCH 2025

## Teagasc College of Amenity Horticulture Open Day

- **Venue:** Teagasc College of Amenity Horticulture, National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin 9. Eircode: D09 VY63
- **Event Time:** 12 noon to 3pm | Tours on-going Friday, 28 March 2025

## Apprenticeships in Horticulture Webinar Series - March

- **Venue:** Online
- **Event Time:** 12:45pm - 1:30pm

WEDNESDAY, 16 APRIL 2025

## Best Practice in Milking Course - Tipperary

- **Venue:** Roscrea, Co. Tipperary.
- **Event Time:** 9am - 4:30pm

WEDNESDAY, 23 APRIL 2025

## Best Practice in Milking Course - Cork

- **Venue:** Teagasc Moorepark Advisory Office, Fermoy, Co. Cork. Eircode: P61 C996
- **Event Time:** 9am - 4:30pm

FRIDAY, 25 APRIL 2025

## Salesian Agricultural College Open Day

- **Venue:** Salesian Agricultural College, Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick. Eircode: V94 V8N3
- **Event Time:** 10am to 1pm | Tours on-going



Cows returning to the paddock after morning milking at Salesian Agricultural College. The college is holding its open day on April 25.  
 \ Odhran Ducie

## ADVERTORIAL



## Best practices to encourage rumen development

Maeve Regan,  
 Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

While the initial days/weeks of calf rearing may appear to be the most labour-intensive stage for farmers, the first season at grass can prove a more difficult phase for them to manage.

Nutritionally, success is measured by developing the calf as best as possible prior to introducing grazed grass. Given that newborn calves are born with undeveloped rumens, the initial objective is to assist such rumen development prior to being weaned off milk. This enables them to become cost-effective forage consumers.

Rumen development begins within the first few days of life and is advanced by exposure to healthy bacteria from the environment and the consumption of solid feeds. Introducing a palatable calf-starter ration/nut from three days of age (18% Crude Protein) is important, along with access to fresh, clean water and high-quality clean straw ad-libitum (no haylage/silage).

Weaning on a weight basis alone can create a false sense of security in terms of how ready calves are for the next stage of nutrition. Weaning shouldn't be considered until calves are intaking a minimum of 1.5kg concentrate/day in grouped pens – which indicates that the calf's dry matter intakes can cope with the transition to a 100% solid diet.

Year-on-year, cases of calves suffering from setbacks following their introduction to grass can also prove a major influencing factor.

Nutritionally, Spring grass can be high in oils like conjugated linoleic acid, sugars and potentially nitrogen, which young, underdeveloped rumens can find it hard to adjust to. Low covers of grass also have very little fibre, which is a key substrate for good rumen health.

Calves aren't fully functioning ruminants, which is why additional care and attention is required at so critical a phase in their development.

Greater rumen development in early life can help combat such issues, alongside the following: offering concentrates post-turnout, grazing slightly heavier covers until calves have adapted to grazing, offering a fibre source to ease the transition and/or strip grazing calves to ensure stem content is also being grazed.

For more information and calf rearing advice, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor



[www.agritech.ie](http://www.agritech.ie)



## TAMS changes explained – the revised grant ceilings

Recent changes to the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) have made it even more attractive for farmers.

**Tom Fallon**  
Teagasc Farm  
Buildings Specialist



**Table 1: TAMS ceilings for grant aid and rates for the Animal Welfare & Nutrient Storage Scheme**

Animal Welfare & Nutrient Storage Scheme (AWNSS) (See Note 1)		Nutrient Storage Scheme (See Note 2)		
	Investment Ceiling (€)	Grant Rate	Investment Ceiling (€)	Grant Rate
Individual/Company	90,000	40%	90,000	60%
Registered Farm Partnership (RFP)	160,000	40% (See Note 3)	160,000	60%

**Notes on Tables 1 & 2**

1. The same ceilings and grant rates apply to the Tillage Capital Investment Scheme (TCIS) and the Dairy Equipment Schemes as in the 2nd and 3rd column (blue text) above for the AWNSS scheme. It is a combined ceiling so an individual could get grant aid on for example €50,000 under the TCIS and €40,000 under the AWNSS (each at the 40% rate). Each individual farmer has a combined ceiling of €180,000 within AWNSS, which includes NSS.

2. The Nutrient Storage Scheme is not a separate scheme as such but nutrient storage elements within the AWNSS have a separate ceiling and a higher rate of grant. This

scheme applies to four slurry storage systems: Mass Concrete Tanks, Circular Slurry Stores, Geomembrane Lined Stores and Manure Pits and slats applied for as part of the new tank. For example a farmer planning to spend approximately €140,000 on a shed with 60 cubicles and 90,000 on a slurry store could expect to get €90,000 in TAMS grant aid.

3. This assumes no eligible young or woman farmer in the partnership (if there is they have applied under the wrong scheme)

See page 8 for Table 2.

Continued on p8



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1. Independent trial performed at Reading University 2022 (unpublished). 2. Forage Centre of Excellence, Miner Institute (paper pending). 3. Oba, M., and M. S. Allen. "Evaluation of the importance of the digestibility of neutral detergent fiber from forage: effects on dry matter intake and milk yield of dairy cows." *Journal of Dairy Science* 82.3 (1999): 589-596.

The Farm Safety Capital Investment (FSCIS) scheme does not have a separate ceiling but eligible investments are subject to a 60% grant rate. For example an individual farmer who receives grant aid on €20,000 of investment in the FSCIS will have a balance of €70,000 under the AWNSS. Their Nutrient Storage ceiling is not affected.

### Solar investment

The Solar Capital Investment Scheme has a separate investment ceiling of €90,000 and a grant rate of 60%. The Low Emission Slurry Spreading Scheme also has a separate ceiling (€40,000 for individuals and €60,000 for RFP) and a grant rate of 60%.

There are other schemes within TAMS including the Organic Capital Investment Scheme and the Pigs & Poultry Investment Scheme.

Please consult the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) website for the terms & conditions of each TAM scheme, along with explanatory notes on costings & building specifications.

The closing dates for the remaining three TAMS tranches in 2025 are: June 6, September 5 and December 5. Farmers need to start the planning process well in advance because full planning permission is required (where relevant) before application.

**Table 2: TAMS ceilings for grant aid and rates for the Young Farmer and Women Farmer Capital Investment Schemes**

	Young & Women Farmer Capital Investment Schemes		Nutrient Storage Scheme	
	Investment Ceiling (€)	Grant Rate	Investment Ceiling (€)	Grant Rate
Eligible individual or Company	90,000	60%	90,000	60%
Registered Farm Partnership (RFP) + 1 qualifying young or woman farmer	90,000	60%	160,000	60%
	70,000	40%		
RFP + 2 qualifying young/women farmers	160,000	60%	160,000	60%

## Farm Buildings meetings

The recent changes to TAMS and the improvement in dairying in farm incomes, in particular in dairying are both likely to lead to more investment in farm buildings.

To assist farmers Teagasc and the Irish Farm Buildings Association have organised a series of meetings in April (all at 7.30 pm). These meetings will have speakers from the DAFM, Teagasc, FBD and the building industry.

The meetings will outline details of Building Specifications, the responsibilities on the farmer as regards health and safety, with details on Project Management, TAMS and delivering a good project.

In recent years there has been many innovations and progress in the standard of farm buildings so these will be part of

the meetings. Two examples, which are relevant to slurry storage are shown in the panel below.

### Dates

- Ormonde Hotel Kilkenny, Wednesday, April 2
- Firgrove Hotel Mitchelstown Tuesday, April 8
- Tullamore Court Hotel on Weds, April 9
- Ardboyne Hotel Navan, Tuesday, April 15
- Kilmore Hotel Cavan, Weds, April 16

\*You can use this QR code to book your place at a meeting or visit [teagasc.ie.clr.events](http://teagasc.ie.clr.events)



## SLURRY STORAGE AREA EXAMPLES

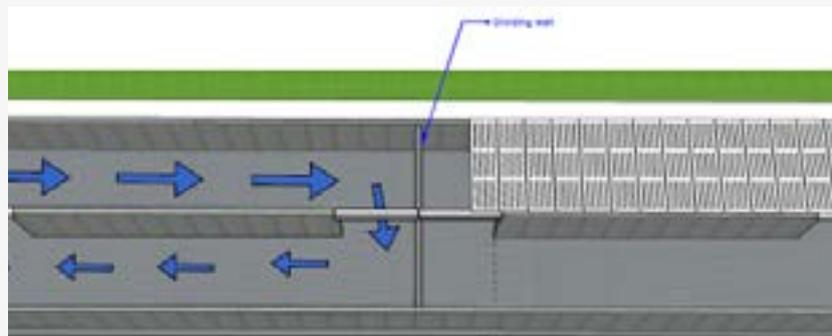
### Split bigger tanks into more manageable sections

Farmers have found very big slurry tanks difficult to handle, in that it can take considerable effort (and cost) to agitate them well, if there is not enough land ready to take the contents the whole process has to be repeated at a later stage.

The drawing (right) shows how an eight bay slatted tank has been split in two to make management easier. The top of the dividing wall can be about 0.25m below slat level so that slurry can level out in the two chambers. It is acceptable within DAFM Specification S123 to agitate up to five bays of a double tank from one end.

### Split bigger tanks into more manageable sections

A fixed 150 to 200mm pipe from the bottom of the tank and attached to a fixed coupling point will make slurry extraction somewhat easier. It saves having to lower in an extraction pipe, taking out a dirty pipe and the pipe sucking itself onto the tank floor.



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Use medicines responsibly ([www.apha.ie](http://www.apha.ie)). MM-36152 (Sep 2024)

zoetis



Aisling Claffey, David Brady and Anthony Mulligan on some of David's heavy Cavan soil.

# Mind the energy gap

In spring, a freshly calved dairy cow's need for energy can be greater than her intake capacity. Optimum nutrition, which means increasing the proportion of grazed grass rather than silage, can help minimise the gap between energy intake and output.

**Aisling Claffey**  
Teagasc Ruminant  
Nutrition Specialist



**T**he early lactation dairy cow naturally succumbs to a period of negative energy balance due to constraints on the intake capacity of the rumen. To help the animal we must maximise the energy intake of the cow during this period by providing her with the most nutritious feed available.

Spring grass is the cheapest generally available source of forage. However, the nutritional superiority of spring grass relative to other forages (see Table 1 on page 11) is often overlooked.

Maximising the proportion of grazed grass in the diet is critical to supporting early lactation performance. There are a number of aspects to be considered when aiming to optimise grass availability during the first and second rotation on farm. These include farm cover, herd demand and daily herbage allowance to achieve high grass intakes.

### Spring grass availability

Some farms may have compromised spring grass availability, as a result of extended grazing in the autumn. It is important that grass is appropriately budgeted on these farms to support an increasing grass allowance as

cows approach peak milk yield.

To understand the importance of grazed grass in underpinning our dairy systems, we must understand the requirements of the dairy cow in early lactation which is measured in terms of UFL, the net energy system utilised in Ireland.

Using the requirements outlined in Table 2, this cow would need to consume 12.5-13 kg DM of spring grass in addition to 4 kg of concentrate in the parlour to support her energy output. To provide the same UFL to the cow during housed periods, she would need to consume 16.5 kg DM of 74 DMD silage, which would not be physically possible due to intake capacity, gut fill and passage rate of silage.

This table highlights the need for access to pasture to meet the energy demands of the early lactation dairy cow, particularly given the intake constraints in early lactation as outlined in Figure 1 from recently published work by Sarah Walsh, Teagasc Moorepark.

Peak milk yield can be reached as early as four to six weeks post-calving, however, peak dry matter intake is typically only reached by week ten of lactation.



Editorial continued on p12

**Table 1: The UFL and PDIE supplied per kg DM across a range of forage types**

Forage source	UFL/kg DM	PDIE availability
Forage source	UFL/kg DM	PDIE availability
Spring grass	1.0-1.1 UFL/kg DM	100-110 g/kg DM
Summer grass	0.85-1.0 UFL/kg DM	90-100 g/kg DM
74 DMD grass silage	0.84 UFL/kg DM	75 g/kg DM
68 DMD grass silage	0.76 UFL/kg DM	66 g/kg DM
25 % starch maize silage	0.8 UFL/kg DM	50 g/kg DM

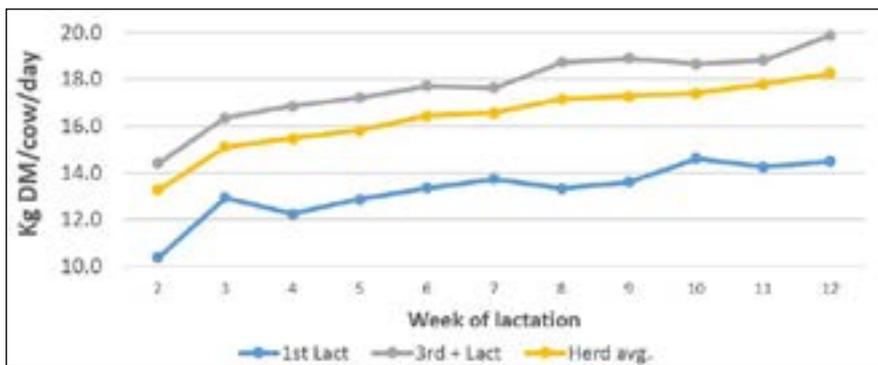
UFL is the unit of energy used in Ireland. One UFL is equivalent to 1kg of barley.  
PDIE means Metabolizable protein supply

**Table 2: The requirements of a 550 kg dairy cow producing 25 kg milk in early lactation at 4.3% fat and 3.4 % protein on 20 % concentrate and 80 % forage diet**

Component	UFL/day
Maintenance	6.1
Activity (+ 15 %)	0.90
Milk production	11.5
0.5 BCS loss <sup>1</sup>	-1.4
Neg. Assoc. Effects <sup>2</sup>	0.6
Total required	17.7
UFL required from forage	13.8

<sup>1</sup>The UFL supplied per day as a result of mobilising 0.5 BCS (85 UFL) over the first 60 days of lactation. <sup>2</sup>The NAE of feeding 20 % of the diet as concentrate (3.5 kg DM).

**Figure 1 : Dry matter intakes in early lactation of first lactation, third lactation and herd average based on 25 % inclusion of heifers from week one to 12 of lactation**



Continued on p12



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For most herds this will begin to occur from St. Patrick's weekend, depending on planned start of calving and calving pattern.

This can be a significant pinch point on farms as there is a high demand for feed (increasing dry matter intake and increasing stocking rate) with a limited proportion of the first rotation left to graze and growth rates are typically not yet sufficient to meet increasing herd requirements.

This can result in a high proportion of silage being included in the diet to support dry matter intake, at the expense of the total energy density of the diet.

Grass silage will restrict total dry matter intake due to its more fibrous nature, in addition to its lower energy, resulting in a higher requirement for concentrate supplementation with only a marginal increase to milk yield.

Heavily stocked milking platforms will naturally be predisposed to this issue as they are more reliant on silage to fill the gaps through periods of lower growth and low herbage availability in the 'shoulders' of the year.

Recent work from Teagasc Moorepark has also shown that a moderate inclusion of grass silage in the diet (5

kg DM/cow/day) in the first six weeks of lactation has negligible impact on milk yield or milk protein. Beyond this, however, maintaining silage inclusion in the diet (3 kg DM/cow/day from week 7-12 of lactation) impacted on both yield and milk protein concentration, with a carryover impact observed in the following eight week period.

### Heavy soil farms

Heavy soil farms should utilise the earliest window of opportunity to get cows accustomed to grazing. Where ground conditions allow aim to consistently achieve one grazing per day with a particular focus on tools such as on-off grazing to strike a balance between grass intakes and minimising damage underfoot.

High quality forage will be critical to maintaining high energy density and minimise costs incurred from concentrate feed during housed periods.

Despite it being one of the busiest periods in the farming calendar, regularly monitoring average farm cover, regrowths and revising the spring feed budget tool in Pasturebase will help maintain a consistent, if not increasing, grass supply at this critical

junction in early lactation.

Many farms that completed Profit Monitors for 2024 will have had the opportunity to assess the milk production achieved from home-grown pasture on their farms, with high pasture input per cow being one of the critical factors differentiating the most profitable farms from their counterparts.

## Body Condition Score

Body Condition Score (BCS) loss in early lactation also plays an important role in the subsequent fertility of the herd. Active monitoring of herd body condition score and intervention for under-conditioned cows in the coming weeks will ensure better fertility outcomes.

Identify animals that are of BCS 2.5 or below and place these animals on once-a-day milking to allow them the opportunity to recover condition in advance of breeding. Ideally the herd should be on a rising plane of nutrition in the run up to breeding. Grassland management and budgeting will be key to ensure increasing grass intakes and maintaining pasture quality throughout the month of April.

## CASE STUDY: David Brady, Stradone, Co Cavan Walking the farm to assess ground conditions



David Brady milks 113 cows and is part of the Heavy Soils Programme. In 2024 he achieved 524 kg milk solids/cow sold, achieving a net pasture input 4,400 kg DM/cow in the form of grazed grass and high quality grass silage to buffer during spring and autumn, particularly in periods of difficult grazing conditions.

"Spring 2024 was particularly challenging for us," says David. "High rainfall increases the challenges on our heavy drumlin landscape, limiting grass in the diet."

David focuses on late grazing of designated silage ground in autumn to allow for cutting in early May. "Silage quality is critical to support early lacta-

tion performance when access to pasture is limited, with cows offered 73 DMD silage and 6 kg of meal when grass was not included in the diet last spring. We utilise on-off grazing to increase the number of days we can achieve at grass during the first rotation."

### Ground conditions

David walks the farm regularly throughout the spring period, assessing ground conditions to ensure every opportunity to get to grass in the diet is achieved.

He monitors farm covers and skips out of the end of the first rotation if growth allows to ensure pre-grazing herbage mass and pasture quality are not compromised during the summer months.

## Key points

- Grazed grass is the most superior forage available to support early lactation performance.

- Aim to consistently achieve one grazing per day when conditions become challenging.

- Monitor herd BCS and intervene where cows have dropped to 2.5 or below.

- Utilise feed budget tool within Pasturebase Ireland to ensure a consistent or increasing allocation of grass in the diet, particularly on heavier stocked milking platforms.



Dairy farmers should aim to consistently achieve one grazing per day when conditions become challenging.

# Artificial insemination in the suckler beef herd

Last year, 154,547 suckler beef calves, about one in five of the total, were born from AI sires. In this special feature, we look at the advantages and challenges of using AI. By featuring farmers who use AI successfully – and have off-farm commitments – we hope to encourage others to consider using AI on some or all of their herd.

**Catherine Kenny**  
Teagasc Beef Specialist



**David Kenny**  
Head of Teagasc Animal & Bioscience Department



Continued on p14

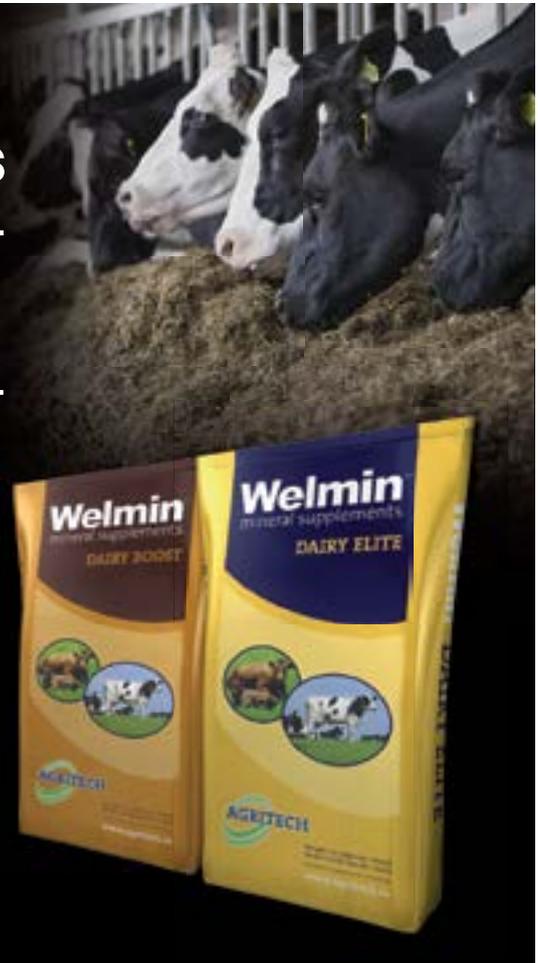
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## The Benefits of using AI on suckler cows

By using AI you can use sires which are genetically superior and would be unaffordable for an individual farmer. You can choose a sire to suit each individual cow or heifer.

- You avoid many of the potential problems associated with bull fertility (see

page 17).

- You avoid the expense and safety risks associated with keeping a stock bull.
- With AI you have the possibility of using sexed semen.
- Improving the genetic merit of suckler cows and, the sires used on them, will increase the value of the farm's output.
- Synchronisation of animals and use of AI can lead to a compact calving

period.

- New genetics can be brought onto the farm without the health risks associated with live animals.

## The challenges

- Heat detection.
- Management of animals that are in heat. Regular handling of animals can be challenging.

## FARM PROFILE: Conor Whelan, Doonbeg, Co Clare



Conor Whelan and (left) Teagasc advisor Niall Lynch.  
Photo: John Kelly

## ‘Selecting the right bull for the right cow is a major advantage of using 100% AI’

**C**onor Whelan farms 48 sucklers part-time on his 48.5ha (120 acre) farm near Doonbeg. He also runs his own fitted kitchen company. “We changed to compact calving from November to January and increased cow numbers in the past five years,” he says. “AI suits my system as I can have the cows AI’d prior to turn out.”

“Over the years I relied on the Euro-Star replacement index as well as what the sire looked like. Now I focus on the sub-indexes, such as daughter milk & daughter calving interval. Fertility and milk are key.”

### Heat detection

A vasectomised bull weanling is fitted with a chin ball to aid heat detection. “I also use ‘Sense Hub’ collars which monitor rumination and activity,” says Conor. “I receive a text if a cow is on heat or if there is a health issue.”

“I use tail paint as a fail-safe tool. Once animals are AI’d I change the colour. I also use calving cameras in the shed to pick up cows on heat. Each morning I check back on the previous night to see if there was any activity.”

Any cow/heifer in standing heat in the morning is AI’d in the evening and any cow/heifer in standing heat

in the evening is AI’d in the morning. There are already 20 cows AI’d in the first two weeks of the breeding season this year. “Once calves are a month old I shut them in the creep area and allow them to suckle morning and evening. This helps break the cow-calf bond and cows come cycling quicker,” says Conor.

### Breeds

His herd consists primarily of Limousin and Charolais cross cows with a selection of Simmental, Angus and Shorthorn cows. He has been using maternal AI sires in a bid to generate replacement heifers.

"I use maternal AI sires as it gives me options," says Conor. "Selecting for traits such as weight and daughter milk has led to the herd increasing the overall herd replacement index. When selecting terminal sires I select for carcass weight +25kg with high reliability.

"Terminal sires I used last year are Ardlea Rolex & Keltic Rembrandt both with a carcass weight of over 25kgs and a carcass confirmation above 2.25, I also used a Charolais Sire Cloonra-doon Ricky who is a son of fiston, a bull that I had great success with – his carcass weight is over 38kg.

"I place a huge focus on selecting the right bull for the right cow and find this a major advantage of using 100% AI."

### Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme

Last year Conor used 15 different sires across the herd. "Conor is participating in SCEP (Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme), and weighs the calves prior to weaning," says Teagasc advisor Niall Lynch. "This year the bulls gained 1.2kg/head/day while the heifers gained 1.05kg/head per day. There were some bulls that gained 1.4-1.55kg/head/day."

The average weight of cows on the farm is 650kg. "I am happy with my cow size," says Conor. "It suits the land and system I'm running. This is something I'm mindful of when breeding my replacements."

For maiden heifers the focus is on ease of calving and high reliability. "This year I used an AI sire called Powerful Proper LM7416 on my replacement heifers. The sire has a heifer calving difficulty of 7.2% and reliability of 99% and a replacement value of €142," concludes Conor."

## AI results in the Derrypatrick herd

### Comparing AI sires

**Peter Doyle**  
Teagasc Research  
Officer – Grassland  
Science



The Derrypatrick herd is an 80-cow suckler calf-to-beef research herd at Teagasc Grange.

The spring-calving herd receives 100% artificial insemination (AI), and completes the breeding season over a nine-week period.

A pre-breeding scan detects animals that are not cycling or have reproductive issues. Once breeding commences the herd relies on three main heat detection methods:

- Tail paint
- Vasectomised bull with a fitted chin ball
- Visual heat detection 3-4 times daily.

Any cow/heifer not inseminated after three weeks of breeding is placed on a synchronisation and fixed time AI program (represents ~10% of cows). When a cow is identified in heat the AM/PM rule is applied for AI;

Over the past five years, the following

breeding results were achieved with the Derrypatrick cows:

- 68% conception rate to 1st service
- 90% submitted for AI in the first three weeks of breeding
- 90% pregnant after nine weeks of breeding

The Derrypatrick program is currently comparing Aberdeen Angus and Charolais AI sires that can achieve high 'weight-for-age' with the aim being to produce carcasses with 'improved' fat cover at young ages (20 months) in a grass-based system.

### Sire selection criteria

Aberdeen Angus and Charolais sires are selected for cows under the following criteria:

- Calving difficulty: < 8% (easy calving)
- Carcass weight PTA: 5 star (high carcass weight)
- Age to slaughter PTA: 4 and 5 star within or across breed (early slaughter age)
- Carcass fat PTA: 1 and 2 star within or across breed (improved 'fleshing' ability)
- Reliability of key traits: >70% (proven bulls)

• An example of some of the sires used to date include:

- Aberdeen Angus: BJB, AA4089, AA4323, AA4638, AA4640, AA8559
- Charolais: CH2216, CH4251, CH4562, CH6271, CH6298, CH6310

“I focus on the sub-indexes, Fertility and milk are key.”



Conor with his wife Kevina and Sarah, Aoife, Ciara and Niamh.

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Continued on p16

## FARM PROFILE:

### Shane Keaveney, Co Roscommon

Shane Keaveney, who farms with his wife Gráinne, operates a suckling to finishing system with bulls finished under 16 months and heifers that are not kept as replacements sold as stores.

"We previously operated a suckling to weanling system," says Shane. "In recent years I have increased my cow numbers from 5 to 37 spring calving cows.

"Back in 2018, my focus was to increase cow numbers and to breed a functional, milky cow so I used a Saler bull. I got plenty of heifers but the downside was the males.

They were not a great seller at the mart so that's when I went down the route of finishing them as bulls," Shane explains.

Three years ago Shane decided to use sexed semen to breed his replacements. "The first year six heifers were inseminated and I was happy that five of them went in calf. I found that it was hard to get the heifers calves at the correct weight for age



Shane Keaveney and (left) Gabriel Trayers.

## Hybrid vigour important to breeding plan

in order to get them to calve at 24 months. "Last year we inseminated 10 cows and seven went in calf. The weather was good at the time and I found it was a big help for breeding the cows and having such a good result."

### Hybrid vigour

Hybrid vigour is very important as part of Shane's breeding plan to produce good quality cattle. A Charolais stock bull is used on the rest of the herd.

When discussing options Shane high-

lighted: "It didn't make sense to buy a bull to breed replacements from, and if I had used conventional AI I would have to get half the herd inseminated to ensure I had sufficient heifers for breeding.

"The other option I considered was buying in heifers but with current high costs it's not an option for me. There is also the risk of disease. Using sexed semen allows me to select for traits I want such as milk to breed the type of cow I want in my herd in the future."

## FARM PROFILE: Eamon and Donnchadh McCarthy, Carrigeen, Co Waterford

# 'It eliminates the need for a stock bull which makes herding stock much safer'

**E**amon McCarthy and his son Donnchadh farm in Carrigeen, Glendine, Youghal, Co. Waterford. Both work off-farm. They farm 45.47ha in three blocks.

"We run a suckling to beef enterprise split into spring (60%) and autumn (40%) calving consisting of 55 suckler cows," says Eamon. "The males are finished as under-16 month bull beef, while the heifers not retained for breeding, are finished at 18-20 months.

"Our own heifers are kept for breeding. We use 100% AI on the farm with bulls selected for high replacement figures for breeding initially and then a high terminal sire used for the rest.

### Breeding and health technology

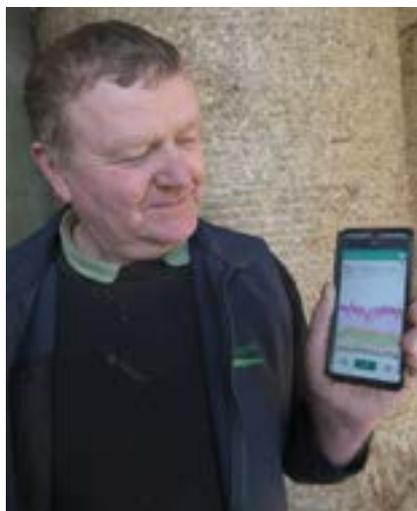
"We have invested in technology to help both breeding and health monitoring of the herd. We like to try new things and use Allflex Sense Hub Technology to improve our herd management. The system is a herd monitoring tool which monitors animal rumination and heat activity. The system relies on a base station and collars/ear tags. We were able to avail of a TAMs grant."

Each cow is fitted with a collar/ear tag and the heat/health information is relayed to the Eamon and Donnchadh via an app on their phones. "The base sta-

tion which is used as part of the Sense Hub is installed in a trailer, which is moved around wherever the cows are at the time of breeding," says Eamon.

"We were using AI before we got the system but it has helped identify cows that weren't showing strong heats that previously may have been missed."

As the system identifies the commencement of heat, it allows the



Eamon McCarthy can monitor the herd's breeding and health status on his phone.

McCarthy's to use more sexed semen for breeding replacements, as the optimum timing for sexed semen use can be identified (14 to 20 hours after heat onset).

"We have achieved high conception rates from sexed semen and we will continue to use this technology depending on sire choice and availability. A key advantage of the system is that it eliminates the need for a stock bull and/or a teaser bull on the farm, which in turn makes the daily job of herding stock much safer," says Eamon.

James Mullane adds: "By using AI the McCarthy's can breed their own replacements from within the herd by selecting high replacement index AI sires and mating these sires on the highest replacement index cows within the herd."

Breeds used are mainly Simmental, Limousin, Angus and Aubrac. Similarly easy calving sires can be selected for maiden heifers. High terminal index sires, mainly Charolais, are used on the remainder of the herd. "Without AI we would need at least two or three bulls for the herd to achieve this," concludes Eamon.

**James Mullane, Teagasc Future Beef Programme Advisor & Shane McCarthy, Teagasc Advisor, Dungarvan**

## FARM PROFILE: Oisín & Charles McDaid, New Mills, Co Donegal

# 'We wanted to breed top quality beef and AI allowed us to select the best genetics'

**O**isín McDaid and his father Charles operate a suckling to weaning system at New Mills near Letterkenny in Co. Donegal. Oisín is completing his final year in his Agricultural science degree in Letterkenny Atlantic Technological university and Charles works full time off-farm.

Their 18 cow suckler herd comprises mainly Limousin and Charolais cows that calve from December to February. Until 2019 they had a Charolais stock bull.

"We couldn't justify the high cost of replacing the stock bull," says Oisín. "We were keeping the bull for 40+ weeks of the year when he wasn't needed and we had the increased risk when herding cattle in the summer. So we decided to go down the AI route.

"We started with 1 & 2 star cows and built to 4/5 star replacements. When selecting sires high reliability is very important to avoid difficult calvings," adds Charles.

"We wanted to breed top quality cattle on our farm and AI allowed us to select the best genetics and match specific sires with certain cows it also creates the opportunity to use sexed semen.

### Compact calving season

"AI helps to compact the calving season to eight weeks. This is a big help as we can plan holidays and sheep lambing (they have a ewe flock) around this and we are focused in calving for a set time before focusing on breeding for 6-8 weeks."

"Good heat detection is key to Oisín and Charles' system," says Gavin Gallagher. "They previously used a vasectomised bull and scratch cards but their cows now show strong heats and they didn't need to use these aids last year."

"We follow the AM/PM rule. Last year conception rates for heifers were 95% and cows were 90%," says Charles.

"We use sexed semen to breed our own replacements from our best cows. We focus on the sub- indexes for milk, fertility and gestation.

"For terminal sires we focus heavily on carcass confirmation and carcass weight, terminal sires are used for breeding top quality weanling bulls for the export market and feedlots. When feedlot buyers get good results



Oisín McDaid and Teagasc advisor Gavin Gallagher. Photo: Clive Wasson

from our calves they have consistently come back for more. Our last weanlings sold at €4.71 a kilo at the local weanling sale."

### 'Milky fertile cows'

"Going forward our focus is on breeding a milky fertile cow with a square pelvic area to allow the use higher carcass confirmation bulls for the heavy quality weanling at selling,"

says Oisín.

For any farmer considering using AI Oisín concludes: Talk to your AI specialist to select bulls that suit your needs and always bring calving ability into consideration when working off farm, at the moment it is working a treat for us here."

### Catherine Egan and Gavin Gallagher, Teagasc Letterkenny

## Key points: Bull fertility

- While the reported incidence of infertility in stock bulls is low (3-5%), subfertility is much more common (20-25%), with significant differences between bulls.
- Subfertility may be caused by low libido, sperm quality/quantity, defects or physical factors affecting bull mobility or mating ability. With AI semen quality is virtually guaranteed.
- Frequently, sub-fertile bulls go undetected and farmers may be unaware of the problem until much of the breeding

season has elapsed or until pregnancy scanning.

- There is no guarantee that a bull will retain his fertility from season to season or even within a season.
- A Bull Breeding Soundness Evaluation (BBSE) will help identify potential fertility issues in advance of the onset of the breeding season.
- Ideally, a BBSE should be conducted annually by a veterinary surgeon at least 60 days prior to the start of the breeding season.

**David Kenny, Teagasc Grange**



Continued on p18

## FARM PROFILE: Niall Ryan and family, Glenamaddy, Co Galway

**N**iall Ryan farms part-time with his father Joe, and wife Deirdre, just outside Glenamaddy in Co. Galway. The suckler herd comprises of 40 Parthenaise and Limousin cows. Bulls are sold as weanlings and heifers are either kept as replacements or finished.

“Since taking over in 2008 I have been using AI,” says Niall. “We also had a Limousin stock bull. In 2021 the stock bull got injured and we bought a new one. The following year, after having served only five cows he got injured and I decided to go 100% AI.”

Niall purchased a vasectomised bull and fitted him with a chin ball for heat detection. Niall uses the AM/PM rule for timing AI. “I have a wide select of cows in the herd. AI enables me to match a particular AI sire to each cow and this is important particularly when I breed my own replacements.

“Using AI has enabled me to restrict my calving season to eight weeks which has definitely helped as I am working off-farm. AI has also opened up markets for bull calves to be sold as weanlings, stores or exported.

### Dual purpose sires

“Most sires are terminal and I try to select dual purpose that are suitable for breeding with milk or produce a good weanling for sale. Docility is also important. Last year I used CH6490 which has 34kg beef carcass and 1.96 carcass confirmation.

“The sire is easy calving 4.5% and has a reliability of 99%. I also used LM8622 with a carcass weight of 38.9kg and carcass confirmation of 2.46 and is easy calving. I used LM8259 which has 29.6kg beef carcass and 2.48 carcass confirmation. The sire is easy calving 4.1% and has a reliability of 96%.

“On the replacement heifers my main focus is on ease of calving and high reliability. I use an AI sire called Powerful Proper LM7416. The sire has a heifer calving difficulty of 7.2% and reliability of 99%.

“I also used this sire on the last few cows that were AI'd as they will be calving at the end of the calving season it's important that these cows will calve without difficulty. This is important from a labour point of view and also that they will go back in calf within the eight week breeding season.

“I was concerned about the labour involved in getting cows in calf using AI. With the use of a few reels and pig-tail posts I use a very simple system to get the cows in for breeding. Last year I AI'd for 54 days and calving season was 54 days. 55% of the cows held to first serve and 92% were in calf after



Niall Ryan and (left) Teagasc advisor Ross Fitzgerald.

# ‘The stock bull getting injured has proved to be a blessing in disguise – I wouldn't go back’

the second service. Based on AI dates there is potential to have 89% of the herd calved in six weeks.”

### Synchronisation

“This year I will use a CIDR (synchronisation) on any cow that is not showing heat four weeks into the breeding season. This will help keep my breeding season tight. The stock bull getting injured is now a blessing in disguise and I wouldn't go back.”

Local Teagasc advisor Ross Fitzgerald said: ‘Every year I get calls from farmers about bull fertility or injury issues. Niall's weaning performance report shows that the use of AI is certainly paying off, with bulls gaining 1.3 kg of live weight each day and heifers gaining 1.21 kg.’

**Catherine Egan, and Ross Fitzgerald, Teagasc Advisor Tuam**

## The potential of synchronisation

Identifying suckler cows on heat and separating them from the herd to receive AI can be a challenge. A possible solution is for farmers to identify a group of animals to be bred and work with their vet to synchronise heat in these animals.

“We did a series of trials on this and the system worked well,” says David Kenny of Teagasc Grange.

“The animals will come on heat at the same time and a technician can manage multiple animals on the one visit.

“This can be a way to make rapid genetic progress in a herd, particularly if sexed semen is used.

### Replacements

“There is some cost involved but for a part-time farmer the number of days he might need to take-off is reduced. A farmer could use synchronisation when breeding replacements for example and use a good quality stock bull on the remaining cows.”



Charlie and Charles Smyth

# How to build the best dairy calf-to-beef system for your farm

A father-and-son farming partnership in Cavan are using two complementary beef systems to optimise the use of their farm's buildings

**Fergal J Maguire**  
Teagasc Advisor  
– DairyBeef 500  
Programme



Over 60% of the beef produced in Ireland starts off as calves from the national dairy herd. Existing calf-to-beef producers or farmers planning to add a dairy calf-to-beef enterprise to their farms have a variety of dairy calf-to-beef systems to choose from. Each has its own financial and practical considerations.

Some farmers specialise in a single system. Others will operate several to spread sales and cashflow throughout the year and make best use of their resources including buildings etc. A combination of a 20-month early-maturing heifer system and a 23-month early-maturing steer system can balance housing needs, grazing demand,

and silage requirements.

Charlie Smyth and his father Charles have operated a dairy calf-to-beef system on their farm near Virginia, Co Cavan since 2019. "Prior to then we were purchasing store cattle and bringing them all to finish," says Charlie. "When we first got into calf-to-beef production, we specialised in finishing Friesian bull calves as steers at between 23 and 27 months of age.

"I focused on a Friesian steer system to begin with as the bull calves were relatively cheap. They were born early in the spring and I could get them away after the second winter without going to a third grazing season."



Continued  
on p20

Steers on 5kg of high energy ration.



calf-to-beef production he increased the number of calves purchased each year. However, the higher numbers placed extra pressure on winter housing.

“The problem with housing on this farm, is that I have no standalone calf shed. I have to rely on rearing the calves in the weanling shed. This was not a problem at the beginning but as the number of calves reared on the farm increased, I had to free up pens for weanlings by having finishing cattle gone to the factory by the end of January. This was to allow me to bring new calves onto the farm by mid-February.

### Early maturing bull calves

“I couldn’t achieve this with Friesian steers so I came up with a plan to buy in half of my calves as early maturing bull calves. The majority of these beef-bred animals are finished on this farm by the end of January allowing me to free up space to move the weanlings into their pens.”

As Charlie improved grassland management on the farm by building up soil fertility, drainage, reseeding and improving the grazing infrastructure, he could see that the farm could easily accommodate a higher stocking rate.

“The pinch point to increasing numbers was still winter housing,” says Charlie. “However, it was at housing in early November where we were

caught tight for space rather than when the calves came in February.

“After talking to my DB500 advisor, we decided to bring in a small number of early maturing heifers that would be finished by mid-November. This would allow me to increase numbers as some of the weanlings would be still out grazing until the heifers were finished.

“While I did get some of the heif-



Roof sheeted with clear polycarbonate sheeting to improve brightness in the shed.

ers away by mid-November, most of them were not gone until just before Christmas. In 2023 and 2024 weather had a big impact on performance, which meant that these heifers took longer to finish.

### Housing pressures

“Being on the farm an extra month meant housing was extremely tight during November and December. On our farm where the soil type is heavy I do not think relying on a 20-month heifer system is a good strategy to reduce housing requirements as if cattle have to be housed early, you could be under pressure to accommodate everything.

“In autumn 2024, I put up a new double four-bay slatted shed to ensure that I could house everything comfortably if the weather deteriorated in the backend. However, going forward, I will still operate the three different systems on the farm. It spreads the money coming onto the farm over a six-month period rather than having all the money coming in over two months.

“I also like that for both the early-maturing heifer and steer system, a lot less meal has to go into finishing the animal, but I still like to have a proportion of my cattle as Friesian steers as they are still relatively cheap to buy and perform very well on this farm.”

## HOW IT WORKS: the Smyths' calf-to-beef systems in action

**Table 1: System performance on Charlie's farm**

System	Carcass Weight	Age of Slaughter	Confirmation Grade	Fat score
20-month Early maturing heifer	262kg	22 months	O=	4-
23-month Early maturing steer	300kg	23 months	O=	3+
24-month Holstein Friesian steer	298kg	25 months	O-	3=

### 20-Month Early Maturing Heifer Beef

This system is designed for early-maturing dairy beef cross-bred heifers, such as Angus and Hereford crosses, which have a natural ability to lay down fat at a young age. Finishing heifers before their second winter reduces winter housing and feed costs, but this depends on several factors.

#### Key Management Practices

- **First Grazing Season** Heifers are turned out to pasture in spring and managed carefully to ensure an average daily gain (ADG) of 0.8 kg.
- **Winter Housing** From November, they are housed and fed grass silage ad-lib, supplemented with 1.5-2.0 kg of concentrates per day, depending on silage quality.
- **Final Grazing and Finishing** In early spring, they return to pasture and are finished off grass by late October/Early November, with a final 60-day concentrate supplementation (2.5 kg/day) to improve carcass quality.

#### Target Performance

- **Slaughter Age** 20 months
- **Carcass Weight** 250 kg
- **Carcass Conformation & Fat Score** O= with fat score 3-
- **Profitability Factors** This system benefits from a short production cycle, reduced feed costs, and high efficiency in grass utilization.

### 23-Month Early Maturing Steer Beef (Dairy Calf-to-Beef)

This system focuses on early-maturing breed steers that can achieve good carcass weights within 23 months. This approach balances pasture use and moderate winter feeding costs.

#### Key Management Practices

- **First Grazing Season** Steers graze from spring to autumn with a target ADG of 0.8 kg.
- **First Winter Housing** They are housed in November and fed high-quality grass silage ad-libitum with 1.5-2.0 kg of concentrate per day.
- **Second Grazing Season** Steers return to pasture in early spring and continue gaining weight naturally, maintaining an ADG of 1.0 kg.
- **Final Finishing Phase** Steers are housed in autumn for an 80-day finishing period with 5-6 kg of concentrate per day to improve carcass conformation and fat scores.

#### Target Performance

- **Slaughter Age** 23 months
- **Carcass Weight** 300 kg
- **Carcass Conformation & Fat Score** O+ with fat score 3=
- **Profitability Factors** The extended grazing period maximizes weight gain from grass, reducing reliance on expensive concentrates while ensuring a good final carcass.



### 24-Month Friesian Steer Beef

Holstein-Friesian steers typically take longer to finish but can be managed efficiently within a 24-month system. This approach ensures a heavier carcass weight while leveraging grass-based production.

#### Key Management Practices

- **First Grazing Season** Steers graze from spring to autumn, targeting an ADG of 0.7-0.8 kg.
- **First Winter Housing** Housed in November, they receive high-quality grass silage ad-libitum with 1.5-2.0 kg of concentrate per day.
- **Second Grazing Season** Turned out to pasture in early spring, gaining 1.0 kg ADG.
- **Second Winter Housing** Steers are housed in November and fed high-quality silage with 5 kg of concentrate per day to ensure proper finishing.

#### Target Performance

- **Slaughter Age** 24 months
- **Carcass Weight** 310 kg
- **Carcass Conformation & Fat Score** O- with fat score 3+
- **Profitability Factors** This system produces heavier carcasses and is well suited for farmers who have adequate housing while maintaining good grass growth.

## ANALYSIS

Each of these calf-to-beef systems offers unique advantages depending on a farmer's land availability, housing capacity, and market preferences.

On Charlie's farm a combination of different calf-to-beef systems has worked well to maximise the utilisation of the extra grass grown on the farm as grassland management improved while at the same time increasing beef output per hectare.

However, some farms will choose to specialise on one particular system and in some cases this specialisation will improve labour efficiency as there will be fewer groups of livestock on the farm.

No matter what system/systems that you incorporate onto your farm, the most profitable systems are those that maximize performance from grazed pasture while controlling concentrate input costs.

It is also essential that you start with a healthy calf with good beef genetics to ensure that performance targets are met throughout the animal's life.



Ewe body condition score (BCS) can be easily assessed by any farmer by putting their hand through the wool of the sheep between the last rib bone and the hip bone and feeling the bone structure in that area. The level of fat and muscle cover in this area is assessed based on how easy or difficult it is to feel each of the spinous processes (bones). The easier it is to pick out the individual processes the thinner the sheep is. The nutritional status of the flock can be easily and cheaply assessed in this manner while also removing the differences associated with breed, age and whether the animal is pregnant, lactating or dry.

# The hands-on approach to ewe body condition

Visual assessment is not a reliable method for assessing body condition score (BCS) in sheep. A group of ewes can appear uniform in condition while hiding a large variation between animal, so BCS can only be assessed by handling the ewes.

**Frank Campion**  
Teagasc Research  
Officer



**E**we body reserves act as a reserve of nutrients for ewes during the production cycle and as the animal moves from mating all the way through to weaning and pre-mating so does the BCS cycle as shown in Figure 1 (opposite). During certain times of the year it is beneficial to have ewes gaining

BCS or maintaining BCS. Equally there are times of the year when drawing down body condition is desirable in order maintain high levels of production such as during lactation.

Ewe BCS has been shown to influence pregnancy rates, litter size, feed intake, milk production etc.

These effects can have long-term impacts on both the performance of the ewe and her lambs.

For most flocks there are two main categories of ewes, 'fit' ewes (BCS 3.0-4.0) and 'thin' ewes (BCS <3.0) and it's the thin ewes that are most likely to have underperforming lambs.

When this was looked over 5,500 records on the Teagasc BETTER sheep farms at mating between 2020 and 2024, we saw that 83% of the ewes were in the 'fit' category and of the other 17% of ewes, 13% were 'thin' (ca. 4% were overly fat). This shows that thin ewes are a bigger proportion and bigger issue within flocks than 'fat' ewes.

Recently we looked at the effect the presence of thin ewes can have on flock performance on some of the flocks participating the Teagasc BETTER Farm sheep programme. Ewe BCS is assessed regularly on these farms and for the purpose of this work we focused on the BCS measurements at mating time and mid-pregnancy (pregnancy scanning time).

Every flock will have some ewes that are 'thin' but as we improve ewe BCS, this number decreases. The fewer thin ewes there are in a flock, the easier they are to manage. However, as can be seen from Table 1, over the six flocks we looked at, we saw that as average ewe BCS declined and the number of thin ewes in the flock increased, the performance of their lambs decreased.

### Mating and mid-pregnancy

When we looked into this further, ewes that were thin at mating and mid-pregnancy that had twin lambs were more likely to lose a lamb compared to 'fit' ewes. Regardless of litter size, ewes that were thin at mid-pregnancy were more likely to lose a lamb than 'fit' ewes.

A similar trend was seen in the ewe culling rates, with ewes that were thin at either mating or mid-pregnancy more likely to be culled compared to ewes that were 'fit' at either of these time points.

So what can you do to manage these thin ewes? First of all BCS can only be assessed by handling the ewes, eyeballing won't work. It is important when thin ewes are identified that they are marked and appropriate action taken.

The first step is to investigate the potential causes such as a broken mouth, flock health issues etc and deal with them. The sooner that thin ewes are identified and action taken the easier it is to manage them and improve performance.

For some issues like a broken

**Figure 1. Depiction of the ewe production cycle showing the desired changes in body reserves during the cycle**



**Table 1: Ewe BCS at mid-pregnancy and twin lamb performance from birth to seven weeks post-birth**

	Flock A	Flock B	Flock C	Flock D	Flock E	Flock F
<b>Litter Size</b>	1.9	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.8
<b>Average ewe BCS @ Mating</b>	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.0
<b>Average ewe BCS @ Scanning</b>	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.1	2.9
<b>% &lt; 3.0 @ Scanning</b>	3	8	11	7	30	50
<b>Twin Lamb ADG 0-14</b>	261	264	237	220	211	224

mouth it might be a case of marking the ewe so that she can be culled once weaned later in the year; for other issues such as health issues, immediate action can be taken.

In the run up to lambing, thin ewes can be managed separately or ewes moved up a pen depending on litter size (i.e. thin twins fed with the triplets). Once lambed, some of these ewes may need to be run as a smaller group being offered some supplementation.



It is important when thin ewes are identified that they are marked and appropriate action taken. The sooner that thin ewes are identified and action taken, the easier it is to manage them and improve performance

The dry period from two to three weeks after weaning up to mating is the best time to rectify any issues with thin ewes. Ewe nutrient requirements are at their lowest at this point and any extra intake is put towards her own condition.

### Preferential treatment

Thin ewes should be marked at this point and given preferential treatment (i.e. put in with ewe lambs) and ewes that fail to regain BCS should be culled as it may indicate an underlying health issue.

It is sometimes not possible to cull all thin ewes if there is a lot of them in the flock. Where they are present they should be bred to rams not intended to breed replacements so that ewe lambs are not being kept from ewes that are not suitable for the system.

This highlights the importance of keeping enough replacements so that we have enough new ewes coming into the flock each year to keep the age structure balanced and allow for problem ewes to be removed without depleting overall numbers.

Reducing the number of thin ewes makes management easier while also improving flock performance with higher lamb growth rates, lower mortality and fewer cull ewes.

# Controlling disease in winter barley

The area of winter barley planted for the 2025 season is significantly higher than in 2024, thanks to favourable sowing conditions last autumn

**Ciaran Collins**  
Teagasc  
Crops Specialist



**Stephen Kildea**  
Teagasc  
Research Officer



**C**rop establishment has been excellent, with few bare patches in fields. Winter barley crops are in a good position to perform well. Effective disease management will be crucial in achieving target yields.

## High yield in barley

Achieving a high yield of barley depends on producing a crop with a large number of grains per m<sup>2</sup>. Research shows that high yielding barley crops produce 18,000 – 20,000 grains /m<sup>2</sup> and that ear number has the greatest influence on grain number; grain weight is not a large factor. A 'thin' crop or a crop with a low ear number is unlikely to achieve a high yield because of the inability of a barley crop to compensate via higher individual grain weight. Wheat, on the other hand, can compensate for thinner crops with more and heavier grains.

## Role of fungicides

Fungicides play an important role in achieving high ear numbers. This is especially relevant in the early part of the season where disease can reduce the number of tillers produced. The typical yield response from disease control in winter barley is much less than that in winter wheat but it is still significant at 1.0 – 1.5t/ha.

Teagasc trials show that a three spray programme (mid/late tillering



< gs 30, early stem extension gs 31-32 & awn emergence gs 49) gives the best response from fungicides with the early stem extension and awn emergence timings being most important.

The earlier timing of mid- to late-tillering may be required in crops with a high level of disease or in varieties with poor disease resistance. However, many growers get excellent disease control from a two-spray programme at stem extension and awn emergence.

## Accessing the risk

Early sowing and successive barley crops will increase disease risk so walking crops from mid-tillering on is essential to access the level of disease present in the crop. Net blotch and rhynchosporium will be most damaging at this time and will reduce tiller numbers if left uncontrolled. It

**Table 2**

Chemical group	Example product
Azole	Proline
SDHI	Imtrex
QoI	Comet

is also very important to refer to the DAFM recommended list resistance to disease ratings to access the level of risk.

## Control

For mildew control, Prothioconazole-based products (e.g., Proline) are effective. While mildew specific fungicides may not be necessary in all cases, if mildew pressure increases, adding a specific mildewicide should

be considered in susceptible varieties – e.g. Cassia, Joyau and Integral.

Our current winter barley varieties have relatively good resistance to net blotch (all rated 7 except for Canyon (6)) and rhynchosporium (Cassia (4) is an exception). Resistance is present in Irish Net Blotch populations, particularly to SDHI and Qol so the best control will come from Qol based (eg. Comet) in combination with and Azole (e.g. Proline).

Ramularia poses the greatest threat late in the season. In high pressure situations full control is unlikely, so the goal is to delay its impact long enough to minimise yield loss. Recent Teagasc research indicates that Revystar XL, Macfare Xpro, and a Prothioconazole/Folpet combination can provide effective control.

**Table 1: Winter barley disease control strategy**

	Late tillering (GS 25-30)	Stem extension (GS 31-32)	Awns emerging (GS 45-49)
Diseases	Rhynchosporium Net blotch Mildew	Rhynchosporium Net blotch Mildew	Ramularia Rhynchosporium Net blotch Mildew
Low disease pressure	Azole / SDHI or Qol		Azole / SDHI or Qol & Multisite (folpet)
High disease pressure	Azole / SDHI or Qol	Azole / SDHI or Qol & Multisite (folpet)	Azole / SDHI or Qol & Multisite (folpet)

**Table 3: Winter barley recommended list 2025 - resistance to disease**

	Belfry	KWS Cassia	KWS Joyau	KWS Tardis	Molly	SY ARMadillo	Integral	Orcade	SY Canyon
Mildew	6	5	5	6	8	6	(5)	(7)	(8)
Rhynchosporium	8	4	6	7	7	8	(6)	(7)	(7)
Brown rust	6	7	7	6	7	5	(7)	(8)	(7)
Net blotch	7	7	7	7	(7)	7	(7)	(7)	(6)



Continued on p26

## WHAT IS THE CBV?



## USEFUL INFORMATION

The CBV is a tool that gives farmers an insight into the genetic value of animals that are destined for beef production.

CBV Traits	% of Dairies CBV
Carcass Weight	25%
Feed Intake	24%
Factory Spec	12%
Carcass Conformation	11%
Finishing Age	10%
Docility	1%
Carbon	0%

Higher CBV animals are more likely to:

- Produce heavier carcass weights.
- Have a higher kill out percentage.
- Be more feed and carbon efficient.
- Meet factory specifications.



Pedigree breeders should consider the Dairy Beef Index (DBI), when breeding bulls for use in the dairy herd.

More than 620k calves were genotyped in 2024 with over 18k having breed errors corrected.

Genotyped animals will display their CBV on mart boards. If purchasing privately, information can be accessed via HerdPlus.

ICBF analysis of over 56,000 AA x FR steers finished in 2023, shows the top 10% on CBV made €275 more at finish than the bottom 10%.

Watch our 'Understanding CBV' campaign developed in collaboration with Agriland.



Contact us: query@icbf.com / 023-8820452

## FARMER EXPERIENCES

### Introducing cover crops and long-term rotation to the mix

Jerry and Barry O'Donovan operate a mixed tillage and beef enterprise in Ovens, Co Cork growing a variety of crops such as winter and spring barley, fodder beet and beans. The farm is a light, free-draining sandstone soil and the O'Donovans like many tillage farmers historically had a rotation of sugar beet with spring and winter cereals.

Barry has a real passion for soil health and is endeavouring to move away from the continuous cereal growing that was a mainstay in the post sugar beet years to a more sustainable long term rotation while also introducing cover crops into the mix.

#### Typical problems

"Winter barley has always been an important crop for us, even though our area has reduced in recent years in favour of beans and oilseed rape," says Barry.

"We were starting to see the typical problems associated with growing continuous winter barley like Sterile Brome creep up on us."

Workload needs to be balanced and in Barry's own words: "We aim to have a portion of our harvesting completed in July to get through the workload and likewise a portion of our sowing completed in October."



Barry and Jerry O'Donovan with Teagasc advisor Michael McCarthy.

Disease control in winter barley has always been an arduous task and Jerry favours a three-spray programme to get the best results. "It all depends on the year and the season but more than likely we will be using three fungicides.

"Ryncho and Net Blotch are our concern early in the season and then it's all about Ramularia at the final spray."

#### Fungicides

Jerry will try to start his fungicide programme weather permitting in mid-March when the crop is just moving to GS 30, typically a Proline/Strob mix as

the O'Donovan's are confident this will give them the effective disease control they require.

The second fungicide will be applied at early Flag leaf (GS 37). "We try to combine the second fungicide with a growth regulator if we can if the crop requires it," adds Jerry.

"The third fungicide is aimed at awns emerging. We are lucky we have very effective products for barley but Chlorothanonil is a big loss, we are definitely seeing much more Ramularia than in the past."

**Michael McCarthy, Teagasc Business & Technology Advisor, Mallow**

## Knowing what and when to spray...

Each year Teagasc conducts research in both winter and spring barley to provide growers with advice as to what fungicides to apply and when to apply them. To ensure the information from these trials is representative of what is actually happening in farmers' fields these are typically conducted on a number of sites, with varying levels of disease pressures.

As Ramularia is a late-season disease, often only appearing in mid-June in winter crops or mid-July in spring crops, designing trials to focus solely on it can be difficult. To overcome this, we try to select varieties on which to conduct the

trials that have good resistance to the other diseases. Without this, diseases such as Rhynchosporium or net blotch will have killed the crop before we can investigate Ramularia.

#### Test products

However, as such varieties are not always available, the trials are designed in such away to minimise the impacts of the other diseases. Often this simply involves over-spraying the trial area with fungicides that we know will control those other diseases, whilst allowing Ramularia to develop. We can then apply our test products at the ideal

growth stage for Ramularia control, awns emerging, knowing that the only major disease present is Ramularia.

Whilst awns emerging is the most effective fungicide timing to control Ramularia Teagasc is conducting a series of trials with fungicides applied at all the different typical timings, alone and in combination.

In doing so this will provide the much needed data to help us understand how the wider fungicide programme impacts Ramularia development and therefore guide future fungicide programmes.

**Stephen Kildea**



## Cutting farm emissions: know your entitlements

Farmers see themselves as custodians of their land and want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), enhance biodiversity, and improve water quality and soil health. There are many schemes which provide advice and/or financial support. This article focuses on the supports available to reduce GHG emissions.

**Siobhan Kavanagh**  
Teagasc Signpost  
Programme



### TAMS

TAMS grants offer farmers financial support to adopt more sustainable practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with other environmental benefits also including water quality and soil health etc. Some of the key grant aided activities include:

- LESS equipment & upgrading of slurry organic manure storage,
- Precision agriculture – GPS controlled equipment,
- Rain water harvesting support, soil aerators
- Solar panels, biomass boilers, and heat pumps on farms
- Grass measuring tools, water systems & infrastructure
- Milk recording equipment and weighing equipment

**Impact on emissions** Availing of these grants can help lower emissions by reducing reliance on chemical N through better use of organic manures and precision fertiliser application; reduced energy costs reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; reduced emissions per kg of product produced through careful monitoring of animal performance; and reduced animal and manure methane emissions through better grassland management.

**Payment** The grant Aid Rate is standard 40%, with 60% available for young farmers, female farmers & organic farmers. There is an investment ceiling of €90,000 per holding over the scheme's duration. If two or more farmers are in a registered farm partnership, the ceiling increases to €160,000.

### Forestry Programme

The DAFM Forestry Programme supports the integration of trees as an accessible, practical, and financially viable choice for farmers. With an attractive range of planting options, there is a place for trees on every farm.

Programme features include:

1. Support for all forest types and sizes: from small scale native planting to more commercially-focused forest types
2. Agroforestry - enabling sustainable benefits from the integration of trees with either livestock or crops on the same land
3. Native woodland, emerging forests and continuous cover forestry options
4. Education and Guidance: The programme includes comprehensive decision supports through advisory and training services, and access to forestry specialists, making the transition to trees in the landscape accessible to farmers.

**Impact on emissions:** New forest creation is a highly significant measure to help address the effects of climate change. Trees and forests play a key role in the capture and removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

**Payment:** The Forestry Programme covers up to 100% of the forest establishment costs.

Attractive annual premium payments are income tax-free, and eligible applicants can continue to claim Direct Payments (BISS/CRIS) on their forested land.

## Examples

**Native Woodland Establishment** Grants of €6,744 /ha, with additional fencing grants and a 20-year annual premiums of €1,103/ha/year

**Agroforestry Establishment Grants** up to €8,555 /ha, with additional fencing grants and 10-year annual premiums up to €975/ha/year

## Processor incentive schemes(technology)

Many processors have sustainability action payments available for milk / meat suppliers, to enhance on-farm economic and environmental performance. These initiatives provide an incentive for farmers to implement technologies which enhance environmental sustainability. The technologies are closely aligned with the Teagasc MACC / 12 steps plan.

**Impact on emissions** The actions supported by these programmes include reducing reliance on chemical N; using NBPT-protected urea; improved animal performance; planting of hedges etc. These actions reduce greenhouse gas emissions while also enhancing biodiversity, soil health and water quality.

**Payment** Rates vary depend on the processor: For example, some of the dairy processors are offering 0.25-0.50c/litre for implementing 3-7 measures per year.

## Eco-scheme

The Eco-scheme is an environmental scheme applied for via your BISS application. Farmers must implement either: two agricultural practices from a list of eight or a single enhanced agricultural practice on all eligible hectares must be selected.

Actions that contribute to reducing emissions include: maintaining at least 7% of farmland for biodiversity; maintaining low stocking rates ( $\leq 1.4$  LU/ha); planting native trees and/or hedgerows; limiting chemical N usage, use of GPS for fertiliser spreaders or sprayers; soil sampling and applying lime; and planting a break crop as well as using multispecies and legumes.

**Impact on emissions** Better management of hedgerows and planting of native trees/hedgerows will lead to increased carbon stored on farm while lower stocking rates mean less animal and manure methane emissions. Using soil sample results to correct pH and fertility issues will help reduce chemical N use.

**Payment** The Eco-scheme is an estimated payment of €65-€70 per hectare per year and is available to all active farmers receiving the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS).

## Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)

The Organic Farming Scheme provides financial support to encourage the production of organic foods. Partial conversion of the farm to organic farming is allowed, subject to certain rules.

**Impact on emissions** This scheme offers financial support to farmers transitioning to organic farming, and offers multiple advantages to the environment – reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving water quality, enhancing biodiversity and carbon sequestration potential.

**Payment** Drystock farmers entering into a contract may qualify for yearly payments of up to €300 per hectare during the conversion period, and up to €250 per hectare when they have achieved full organic status.

Higher payment rates are available for organic horticultural and tillage farmers, and dairy farmers. An amount of €2,000 will be paid to OFS participants in the first year of conversion and €1,400 for every subsequent year of the contract.

## Straw incorporation measure (SIM)

This scheme is designed to provide financial support for tillage farmers. It enables them to increase soil organic carbon (SOC) levels by chopping and incorporating straw from cereal and oilseed rape crops.

Straw incorporation is an important measure for tillage farmers in Teagasc's Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC), which outlines actions farmers can take to both reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and capture carbon..

**Impact on emissions** Incorporating straw into the soil has been shown to deliver significant carbon sequestration (capture) benefits. According to the MACC, this practice can achieve an annual reduction of 1.08 tCO<sub>2</sub> eq per hectare.

**Payment** The payment is €250 / ha for cereals and €150 / ha for oilseed rape, up to a maximum of 40 ha.

## Protein programme

The payment provided under this scheme is an important support for tillage farmers for the growing of protein crops, including beans, peas, lupins and the protein cereal mix crop.

**Impact on emissions:** As protein crops fix their own nitrogen from the atmosphere they require zero chemical nitrogen which is good for the environment and good for the pocket. Reduced imported feed means less transport energy costs and fewer emissions associated with the growing of the growing of protein sources in some parts of the world.

**Payment** Annually the government has committed to 7 million euro for this scheme, and may add more if oversubscribed. Annual payments were generally c. €250/ha but in 2025 this looks likely to rise to almost €500/ha.

## The Signpost Advisory Programme

The Signpost Advisory Programme provides all farmers, Teagasc clients and non-clients, with the support to enable them to adopt the main technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. When a farmer signs up to this free advisory service they get access to the AgNav programme AgNav program and the total emissions for their farm.

Signpost advisors will support farmers to identify the actions that might suit their own farm and from that develop a tailored three-year plan for the farm.

**Impact on emissions** The advisors in this programme focus on the 12 steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on all farms. [www.teagasc.ie/signpost](http://www.teagasc.ie/signpost)

**Cost:** Free

## Other schemes

The following are schemes that farmers are participating in but that are not currently open to new entrants or may become available in the future.

### Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)

This incentivises actions to improve biodiversity, climate resilience, air, and water quality. Key actions include buffer zones along watercourses, hedgerow planting, and habitat preservation.

**Soil sampling scheme** This provides farmers with free soil sampling and detailed insights into the nutrient status of their farms, for more targeted soil management practices.

**Carbon farming** DAFM is developing a National Carbon Farming Framework to enhance participation in carbon removal, emission reductions, and ecosystem services.

### Multi-species sward & red clover silage measure

The red clover silage measure aims to encourage farmers to establish red clover silage swards. In 2024, DAFM contributed up to €300 per hectare for the establishment of Red Clover Silage Swards mix to farmers participating in the measure.

### Knowledge Transfer Groups

The programme aims to increase participants' understanding of topics such as climate change biodiversity, water quality, air quality and soil health etc. Farmers are paid up to €750/participant/year.

### European Innovation Partnerships

These engage researchers, farmers, and other stakeholders to implement innovative solutions with a ground up approach e.g. FarmPeat project.



Continued from p27

# Managing hedges is vital for our birdlife

Both treeline hedges and topped hedges are important habitats, provided each type are managed appropriately. Catherine Henna, Teagasc Countryside Management Specialist, and Niall Hatch, from BirdWatch Ireland, describe some of the 35 bird species that live in our hedges.

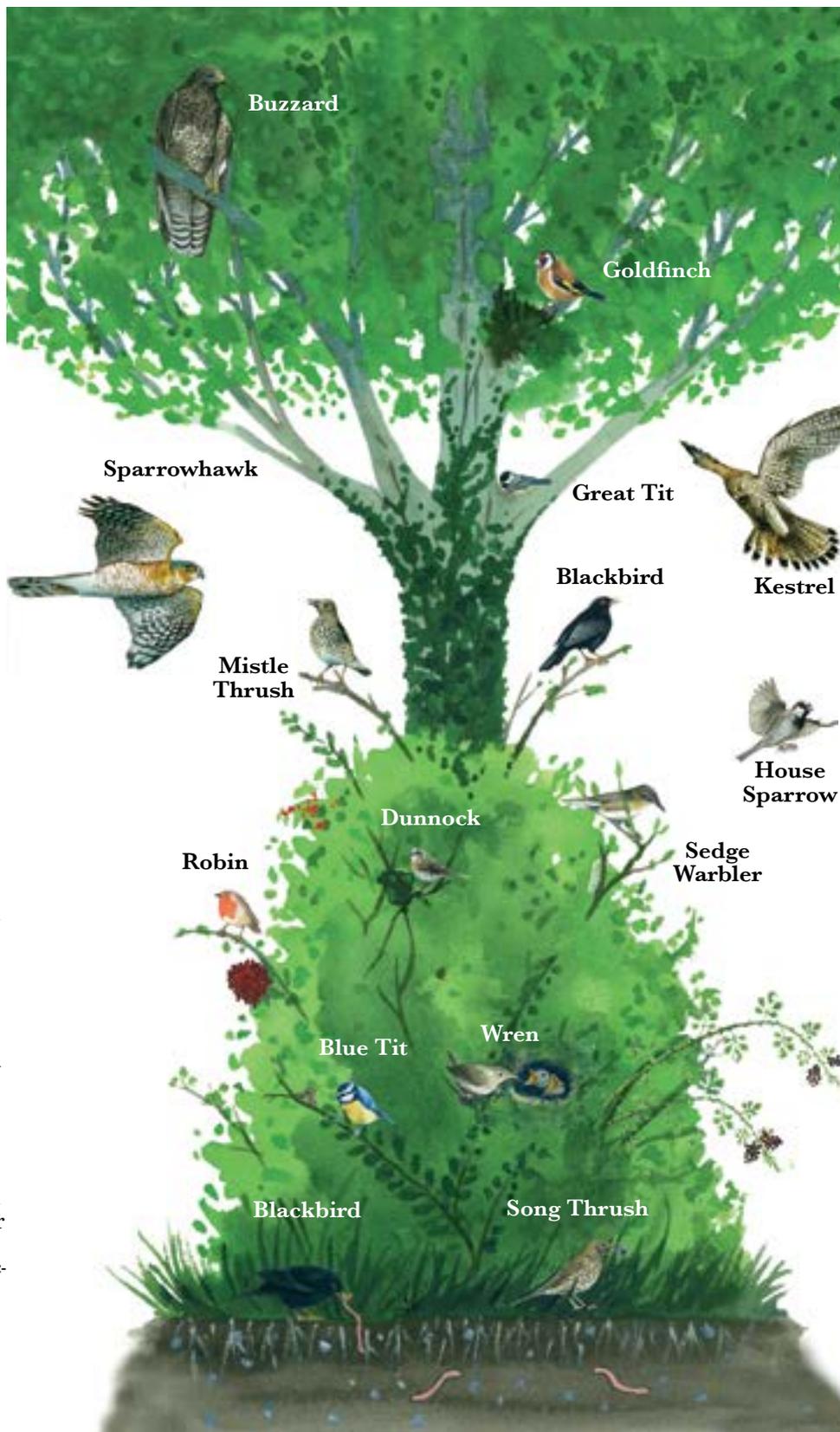
**T**he dunnock, a common bird in Ireland, which used to be known as the hedge sparrow loves the security of hedges. It nests behind thorns and brambles for security from predators like foxes, cats, hawks, squirrels and rats.

The wren, one of our most common birds – there are more wrens than human beings in Ireland – tends to nest quite deep down, building a ball of a nest tucked away in the vegetation. They are really hard to locate and it is very difficult for surveyors to find their nests.

Individuals are usually located by listening to males singing on their breeding territories.

Robins like to nest quite low down. They select locations which offer good vantage points but are still quite secluded. There will be lots of insects for their chicks in these positions, as well as berries in autumn.

The blackbird is one of our most common bird species, seen all over the country. They use hedges to nest in because of the great protection they provide with lots of food and shelter. Blackbirds know they will be able to get the worms just below



**>>** Continued on p30

the hedges, which means that they don't need to travel very far to find food.

The same goes for the song thrush. They like cover more than the black-bird does. Their lives revolve around snails. They want to be in an area where they know snails are going to seek shelter.

Hedges are perfect for that. They can tuck their nest in, hidden from predators and where they can get on with their lives.

Some birds, like house sparrows, use hedges as corridors for movement. They nest in and around them but also use them to connect up nesting areas. So if hedges are removed, isolating populations of birds with no genetic interflow between them, inbreeding happens, genetic diseases creep in and the population suffers and dwindles.

### Perching posts

Birds perch on the top of hedges for many different reasons.

When seeking a mate they will be singing, once eggs are laid and hatched, the lookout is keeping an eye out for danger while their vulnerable chicks and maybe their partner are in a nest below them. Other times they are looking out for food. Sparrowhawks and buzzards perch on top of hedges, scanning the countryside with their keen eyesight, looking for prey such as small rodents or birds.

### Trees in hedges

It's not only the hedges themselves that are important, it's also the trees growing above them. The body of the

hedge acts like an understory below them, mimicking what happens in a woodland.

Mistle thrushes like to nest in tall trees, and love to have a hedge below them where they can find food and shelter and where they know their chicks will be able to find berries in autumn after they fledge from the nest.

Finch species, such as chaffinch, goldfinch and greenfinch, will often nest in trees in hedges, such as willow, hazel or alder. They use the hedges as a larder, as shelter for their chicks and as a well-protected nest site.

So there are many different species that use not just the hedges but the trees that grow around them.

### Rare birds

There are quite a few rare bird species that depend on hedges. Yellowhammers nest in hedges, and were once very common, sadly this bird has declined greatly in Ireland.

The twite is a little finch, which now only breeds in the northwest of Ireland, often in marginal areas, and it greatly depends on hedges. It is the only Irish member of the finch family that is vegetarian for its whole life.

Most finches are vegetarian as adults but feed insect larvae to their chicks. The twite needs to find vegetable matter for its chicks all the way through the breeding season.

Traditional Irish hedges provide exactly what it needs. Sadly the twite is a bird species that has declined dramatically, and hedges are essential for its survival.



Hedge cutting is prohibited between March 1 and August 31: this allows birds to nest safely and without disturbance. \ Donal O'Leary



Dunnock (Photo: Brian Burke)



Wren (Photo: Shay Connolly)



Robin (Photo: Brian Burke)



Blackbird (Photo: Brian Burke)



Song thrush (Photo: Michael Finn)



House sparrow (Photo: Brian Burke)

**Klara McGriskin**  
Teagasc Farm  
Management  
Specialist



**T**he average age of farmers in Ireland in 2023 was 59 years, so farm succession is now one of the biggest challenges facing the industry. If not properly planned, it can lead to uncertainty, disputes, and even the loss of family farms.

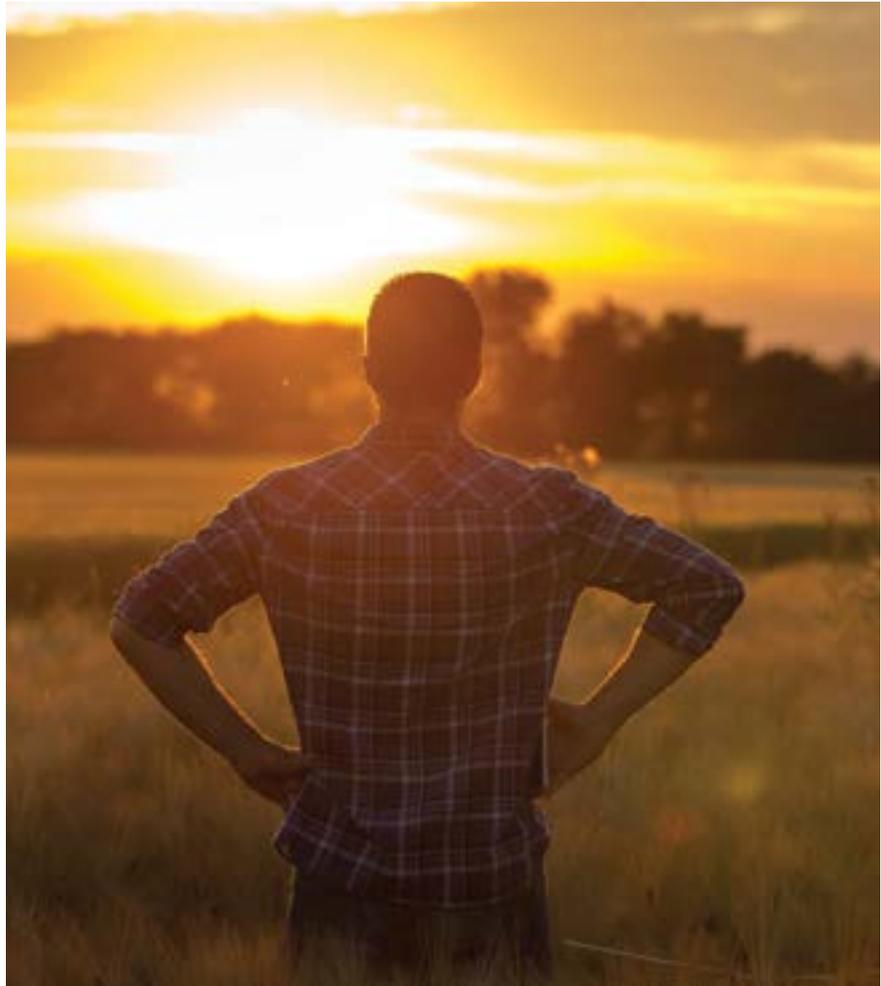
Succession isn't just about paperwork or finances – it's about ensuring the farm stays viable, family relationships remain strong, and the retiring farmer has a clear path forward. Planning early and seeking professional advice makes all the difference.

### Avoiding assumptions in farm succession

Many farmers assume succession will just happen naturally. They believe, often correctly, that their children will take over and the process will run smoothly and easily. However, that is not always the case, and failing to plan can cause delays and disagreements.

Here are some of the most common assumptions – and why they may not hold true.

- “One of the kids will take over.” – While many farmers hope their children will continue the family tradition, times have changed. Job opportunities, higher education, and different lifestyles mean not every child will want to farm.
- “The eldest son will inherit, like always.” – The old tradition of passing the farm to the eldest son, retaining the family name on the land, is no longer automatic. What matters most is choosing someone who genuinely wants to farm and is capable of running the business.
- “We'll figure it out when the time comes.” – Leaving things undecided can lead to family disputes. A clear plan prevents confusion and keeps everyone on the same page.
- “There's loads of time to sort it out.” – Life is unpredictable. Starting early allows for a smoother transition and prevents rushed decisions.
- “The young fella will farm the same way I did.” – The next generation might want to bring in new ideas, like organic farming, agri-tourism, or technology-driven methods. Being open to change helps keep the farm sustainable.
- “The one taking over should get everything.” – While keeping the farm intact is important, fairness matters too. There are ways to ensure non-farming children are treated fairly, such as rental income or other assets.
- “Handing over the farm won't cost



## Handing the farm over to the next generation

With the average age of Irish farmers now 59, succession is one of the biggest challenges facing farming. This article looks at the essential steps for a smooth succession process as well as the options for farmers with multiple successors or no clear successor

much.” – Taxes and legal costs can be a big shock if not planned for properly. Taking advantage of reliefs like Agricultural Relief and the Young Trained Farmer Scheme can reduce the burden.

- **“Only family can take over.” – If no family members want to farm, options like leasing, selling, or farm partnerships can keep the land productive while providing financial security.**

### Succession planning: more than just the farm

Stepping back from farming is therefore not just a financial decision – it's an emotional one too. Farming is more than a job; it's a way of life that shapes daily routines, identity, and community connections. Retirement can feel overwhelming, not just due to financial concerns but also the loss of a sense of purpose and belonging



Continued on p32

That is why planning for life after farming is just as important as the handover itself.

A good approach is to ease into retirement gradually – maybe by keeping a small part of the land to farm, staying involved in decision-making, or mentoring the next generation.

This allows farmers to stay connected while transitioning to a new stage of life.

## Five key steps in farm succession planning

### 1 Start the conversation early

Succession planning should begin years in advance, not at the last minute. Talk openly with family members to understand their interests and expectations. Avoid making assumptions – clear communication prevents disputes.

### 2 Identify the successor and other beneficiaries

Decide who will take over the farm and how to provide fairly for other family members. The successor should be committed to farming and capable of running the business. If there are multiple children, consider inheritance structures that maintain fairness while keeping the farm intact.

### 3 Develop a financial and legal plan

Work with advisors to create a plan that covers:

- Ownership transfer (gradual or full handover).
- Tax planning (to minimise costs like inheritance tax and capital gains tax).
- Legal structures (wills, family trusts, or partnerships).
- Retirement income for the outgoing farmer.

### 4 Plan for a smooth transition

A gradual handover often works best, allowing the successor to build experience while the retiring farmer stays involved. Options include:

- Farm partnerships The older and younger generations work together before full transfer.
- Leasing land Provides a steady income while keeping ownership.
- Gradual sale Selling the farm in stages rather than all at once.

### 5 Consider life after farming

Retirement is a major life change, so it's important to consider what you want from it. Whether that means continuing to farm on a smaller scale or stepping away completely to explore other interests, having a clear plan will help make the transition smoother.



## Managing multiple successors Invest in mediation – prevent costly disputes

For families with multiple successors, succession planning must be clear and structured to maintain both the farm's viability and family harmony.

• **Distinguish farming and non-farming successors** Some children may want to farm, while others may seek a financial share. Solutions like rental income, assets, or education funds can help balance fairness.

• **Use legal structures** Partnerships, family trusts, or LLCs can help define ownership, decision-making, and profit sharing.

• **Expand or diversify** If the farm cannot support multiple families, leasing more land, starting agritourism, or producing value-added products can create extra income.

A key principle to remember: what's fair isn't always equal. Giving a larger share to a child actively farming while providing non-farming children with other compensation ensures the farm remains viable and prevents fragmentation.

Prioritising fairness helps preserve the farm's sustainability, supported by open communication and transparent planning to maintain family harmony.

### Where to start

The first step is sitting down and making sure everyone is clear on what they want – especially the farmer. Do not assume everyone is on the same page. The kitchen table is a good place to start an open, relaxed conversation.

Let everyone have their say and focus on keeping the farm viable, not just dividing assets. If discussions

become difficult, bringing in a mediator or advisor can help keep things on track.

Most importantly, don't leave succession to chance – a well-thought-out plan ensures fairness, prevents disputes, and secures the farm's future.

### Seeking professional help

Professional advisors play a vital role in farm succession:

**Solicitors** Handle wills, land transfers, and legal agreements.

**Accountants** Help with tax planning, inheritance reliefs, and financial strategies.

**Agricultural advisors** Provide guidance on grants, subsidies, and farm viability.

**Financial planners** Ensure the retiring farmer has a secure income.

**Mediators** Help resolve family disputes and keep farm succession discussions on track. As neutral third parties, they ensure all voices are heard and conflicts are handled fairly.

### Finding a mediator

Farmers can find mediators through:

• **Teagasc** Advisory services and referrals.

• **Irish Mediation Institute** Directory of professionals.

• **Legal and financial advisors** Many recommend trained mediators.

• **IFA & Macra na Feirme** Resources and referrals.

Costs vary based on complexity, while some private mediators charge hourly or fixed fees, investing in mediation can prevent costly disputes.

## Options for farmers with no successors

If there is no clear successor, the first step is to decide what you want for the next stage of life and create a plan to make it happen. Options include:

- Selling the farm – Selling to another farmer or a new entrant can provide retirement funds while keeping the land in agriculture. The money from the sale can be shared with family members or used to buy an annuity – a financial plan that pays out a steady income over time. This can give farmers financial security in retirement providing peace of mind without the need for ongoing farm management.
- Leasing the land – Long-term leasing provides a reliable income and tax advantages while allowing farmers to keep ownership of their land. It ensures a steady cash flow without the need to sell, making it an ideal option for those who want to retain their property while generating revenue.
- Farm partnerships or share farming – This enables another farmer to handle day-to-day operations while the landowner remains involved, whether through decision-making, resource contribution, or sharing in the profits. It provides a way to keep the farm productive while allowing the owner to stay connected and benefit financially.
- Diversification – Exploring options like forestry, solar farms, or conservation schemes can provide financial security without full-time farming.

## ANALYSIS: Delays can lead to disputes

Farm succession is one of the most important decisions a farmer will make, and clear communication is key to a smooth transition. Many families avoid the conversation, assuming everyone knows what will happen, but unspoken expectations can lead to misunderstandings, disputes, and delays.

The best approach is to start discussions early and involve all family members, including those not directly involved in farming. Every voice should be heard, ensuring fairness and preventing resentment down the line. Being upfront about who will take over, how assets will be shared, and what role the retiring farmer wants to play can help prevent tension and confusion.

If there is no clear successor, having a plan is just as important. Options like leasing, selling, or farm partnerships can keep the land productive while providing financial security. Seeking professional advice can help farmers make the best decision for their future while protecting their farm's legacy.

### Preserving family relationships

Succession planning is not just about keeping the farm running – it's about preserving family relationships, securing the farm's future, and ensuring a smooth transition for generations to come. Talking now prevents bigger issues later.

To help farmers navigate the challenges of succession, Teagasc hosts Transferring the Family Farm Clinics across Ireland each autumn. These clinics provide practical guidance on succession planning, legal considerations, tax reliefs, and financial security for retiring farmers.

Farmers can attend to ask questions, explore their options, and receive expert advice on how to start or refine their succession plans. The clinics are designed to make the process clearer and less overwhelming, ensuring farmers and their families can make informed decisions about the future of their land. For more information on upcoming clinics, locations, and how to book a place, visit Teagasc's website or contact your local Teagasc office.



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# Forage for equines

Excellent forage quality is key on Paul Beecher's Waterford stud farm

**Sean Keane**  
Teagasc Equine  
Specialist



**W**ild horses graze for between 16-18 hours a day ingesting a variety of grasses and roaming from water source to water source. As a result they have evolved to process small meals throughout the day. Through selective breeding programmes, humans have influenced the evolution of the horse.

To ensure the horses systems are working at optimum levels, we have to mimic their natural life but in the stables. Domesticated horses like their wild cousins are trickle feeders, they must be fed little and often and with a high percentage of roughage.

Unlike bovines which have four stomachs, horses are monogastrics and have

just one. While not having a rumen like bovines, horses have hind-gut fermentation which enables them to recover nutrition from forage.

I recently met Paul Beecher, a Teagasc Equine Signpost farmer to discuss the importance of forage on his farm. Paul is based at Woodhill Stud outside Tallow in Co Waterford and runs a successful stud producing top-class showjumpers.

"When you think that a horse should eat one to three percent of its body-weight daily in forage, this could be between 10 and 30 lbs of hay per day depending on their size and whether they are on concentrate feed," says Paul. "A key benefit of having good quality forage is that it reduces the risk of ulcers."

With a range of animals on the farm including broodmares, youngstock and competing performance horses, it is imperative for Paul to have adequate

supplies of high quality forage.

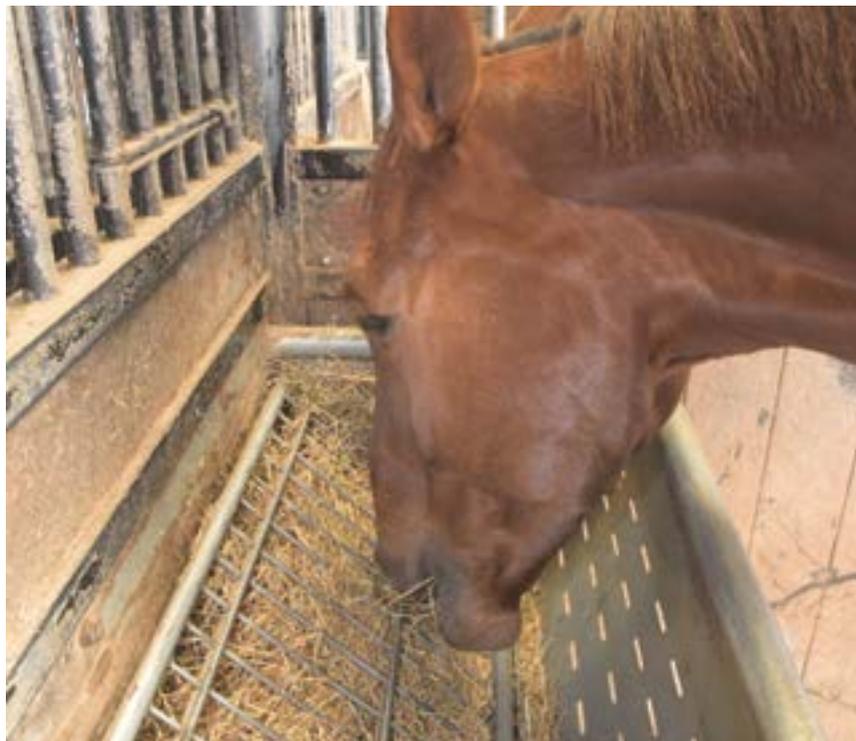
"Good quality forage also cuts down on the amount of concentrate feed that we need to give to our horses," adds Paul.

## Quality and technique

"All hay is saved on the farm in order to ensure quality. When you are buying in hay, you never know what you are going to get so therefore it is good to be able to save your own."

From year to year Paul has an idea as to how much hay he needs and manages his land accordingly. "We have soil samples taken which is an invaluable tool in the fertiliser plan," he says. "Getting the pH right allows the grass an environment to grow and therefore cuts down on wastage. The hay fields can get depleted a little on P and K and this needs to be addressed in line with the sample results.

"I graze the hay fields at the back end



of the year and then they are rested until they are cut again the following year. Early in the springtime I get out with the harrow and pull the dead grass and then I give them a roll. I find this works quite well and keeps the fields in good shape without too much compaction.

“I plan to overseed in the near future to keep these fields fresh and have a good covering of grass and keep the paddocks from getting stale.”

A mixture of perennial ryegrass, timothy and smooth meadow grass will give a versatile mixture of nutrient grass species capable of binding the sward for greater repair of the ground from hoof poaching.

“In recent years we have been wrapping the hay as I was losing the outer layer of every bale due to deteriorating during storage,” says Paul. “I find the hay is less dusty and cleaner as a result.



Getting the pH right allows the grass an environment to grow and therefore cuts down on wastage

I wrap the bales with an extra couple of layers of plastic to ensure that they are properly sealed. I also use the green plastic instead of black as I find that the black gets extremely hot in summertime.

“If the hay is well saved at the time of baling there are no issues. The horses really like it and are thriving since I started doing this. I also get my hay analysed to check for nutrient content and quality. This reassures me that the horses are getting good quality forage at all times. Ideally we will take the first cut at the end of May/start of June and a second cut in August. Weather permitting.”

Paul makes large round bales of hay. Traditional small bales are impractical but when animals are transported he will sometimes have a large bale opened and rebaled as small square bales in order to ensure he knows the quality and consistency is maintained.

### New hay feeders and why

While observing some of the horses in the stables, I noticed that there was a different type feeder (see photo above right) for the hay, so I asked Paul about this. He said that these are designed so that you can adjust the amount of fodder a horse can eat and the frequency at which they eat.

“It is especially good for allowing the horse little and often in terms of how they eat their hay as they can't eat it in big mouthfuls and therefore encourages them to chew and digest their hay better, ensuring that they are not going long periods without eating and so reducing the risk of ulcers,” says Paul.

If Paul has a horse that he wants to feed more to, he can simply open it

up and allow them access to a bigger volume. This is another example of Paul's meticulous and intuitive nature in identifying and implementing ways of not only reducing waste of forage but also providing a healthier diet for his horses.



## Summary

Paul's ability to manage his land in a way that means he can save his own hay ensures that he can provide his horses with excellent forage which is quality controlled to provide good nutrition.

“For me the benefit is peace of mind,” says Paul. “The feed is consistently good, which is vital for horses at all stages. Making excellent forage is also worth the effort financially because it means our concentrate bill is reduced. In short, it's healthier all round.”



Arthur Kierans inspects damage to trees at Ballyhaise Agricultural College, Co Cavan.

# Staying calm after the storm

Forest owners need to step back and get expert advice and support on dealing with storm damage to their forests while salvaging as much timber as possible

**Tom Houlihan**  
Teagasc Forestry  
Department



**John Casey**  
Teagasc Forestry  
Development Officer



**M**any forest owners are currently attempting to safely assess the damage levels wrought on January 24 by Storm Éowyn, which was preceded by Storm Darragh in December. Of key interest is the provision of support to forest owners affected by this weather event.

It has been an upsetting and stressful experience for the forest owners who have been affected by these storms. It is important to step back now and carefully work out the best approach to manage the situation. Remember support is at hand, and Teagasc forestry staff are available to engage with and support forest owners affected by the storm.

If your forest has been hit by the storm, don't rush into making decisions. A well-thought-out plan, expert advice, and careful management can help forest owners deal with the storm damage, protect their woodlands, and recover as much value as possible.

Teagasc's advice is to take a step-by-step approach to minimise risks while salvaging as much timber as possible.

## Step 1 Safety first

A storm-damaged forest can be highly dangerous. Fallen and windblown trees are unpredictable and risky to handle, particularly in challenging terrain, near roads or power lines.

Only fully trained, insured professionals should undertake this work.

Windblown trees can be under all sorts of tension and using large harvesting machines is the recommended safe approach to recovery of impacted timber.

Safety must come first. Follow the Health and Safety Authority's guidelines and be aware of your legal responsibilities as a forest owner. Essential safety information can be found at [teagasc.ie/forestsafety](http://teagasc.ie/forestsafety).

## Step 2 Check your insurance

If your forest is insured – particularly for windblow – contact your insurance provider immediately. If wind cover is included, they will arrange for an assessor to evaluate the damage.

## Step 3 Seek professional advice

Don't tackle this alone. Get in touch with your local Teagasc forestry advisor or a registered forester for guidance tailored to your situation. Independent advice can make all the difference in securing the best outcome for your forest.

## Step 4 Assess the damage

To get a clear picture of the storm's impact, take these actions:

- Arrange for a survey of the area – to identify the extent of the damage, keeping safety in mind.
- The survey should include surrounding standing trees – unstable trees may need to be included in your felling licence application.

Work is ongoing by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and Coillte to assess the extent of damage nationally. This includes using analysis of satellite imagery, which will provide information nationally and at forest level.

Sentinel-2 satellite imagery from the European Commission's Copernicus Browser is openly accessible to facilitate mapping and damage assessment of forests.

DAFM has issued a useful guidance video on the use of this facility, which can be accessed at [www.teagasc.ie/forestrystormdamage](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestrystormdamage)

### Step 5 Apply for a Felling Licence

Under the Forestry Act 2014, DAFM has confirmed that windblown trees require a felling licence, as they still need to be cut, harvested and removed. If you already have a felling licence, check that it includes clearfell operations and replanting of the impacted area.

DAFM have issued guidance with respect to felling and forest road applications where forests that have been damaged by recent storms. For more details, see [www.teagasc.ie/forestrystormdamage](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestrystormdamage).

This guidance applies to:

- New applications not yet submitted
- Applications already in the system
- Amendments for felling licences covering thinning.

There is a genuine commitment to making the application process as efficient and fast as possible.

All windblow-related licence applications submitted on or before August 31, 2025 will be prioritised.

The same also applies for applications already submitted and notified to DAFM as being impacted by the storms.

### Step 6 Plan forest access, and apply for available support

Efficient recovery depends on good access to the affected area. Forest owners should check if they qualify for the Forest Roads Scheme 2023-2027 support from DAFM. At a minimum, you will need room for a timber lorry to turn in from a public road to load your timber. A registered forester can assist with the application, which can be submitted alongside the felling licence application.

### Step 7 Selling timber – get the best deal

When selling timber, don't settle for



Windblown trees are highly dangerous. If a tree is removed others may spring up as tension is released. Harvesting windblown trees requires experience, adequate machinery and great care.

the first offer. Get multiple quotes from buyers and ensure you have a solid timber sales contract that includes:

- Agreed prices and payment schedules
- Harvesting procedures
- Insurance
- Environmental and safety compliance.

Monitor timber movements to maintain security and accountability. More details can be found in Teagasc's Harvesting and Selling Timber from Conifer Forests, available at [teagasc.ie/forestry](http://teagasc.ie/forestry).

### Step 8 Keep records & monitor the process

Accurate record-keeping and use of an appropriate timber tracking system is crucial for:

- Tracking of timber loads leaving the forest
- Compliance with safety and environmental regulations
- Accounting and tax purposes.

Supervise the harvesting and sales process to ensure everything runs smoothly and remains in your best interest.

## Teagasc supports for forest owners

Teagasc forestry staff are very busy assisting forest owners affected by storm damage and providing a range of supports – including one-to-one advice on managing storm damage and assistance in providing guidance on recovery planning.

Teagasc will have a strong focus on working collaboratively with the DAFM Windblow Task Force and assisting owners in getting through this major challenge to help ensure optimisation of the recovery process.

Given the importance of the need for timely communication of a coherent plan for the recovery, Teagasc is also providing a range of supports through issuance of guidance, advice and updates via media channels, Teagasc Daily, Today's Farm, newsletters, e-newsletters, website updates, podcasts and social media.

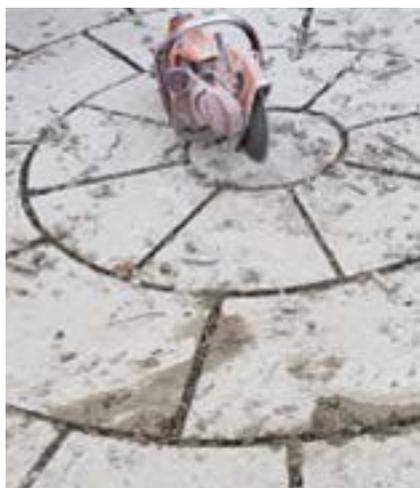
Teagasc will also be organising collaborative events in the coming days and weeks to support forest owners in managing storm-damaged forests. Details of upcoming events, as they are announced, will be available via the QR code, or visit <https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/forestry/events>

Teagasc will be organising a Talking Timber harvest and marketing event on April 15th in Co Sligo – a valuable opportunity to learn more about storm damage recovery and timber sales.



# Elbow grease and patience – sprucing up your paving

## For best results, use a power washer



Remove damaged jointing material with consaw.



Wash down the paving and remove all loose debris.



Repoint and seal the paving with a jointing and sealant product.

**Paddy Smith**  
Teagasc College  
of Horticulture



**T**his is a straightforward DIY task that requires a bit of elbow grease and patience. Most weeds and mosses can be pulled or scraped away using a gardening hoe or similar tool. For loose debris, a stiff yard brush works well to clear the surface.

For a more efficient approach, manufacturers offer rotating bristle brushes which attach to powered garden tools. These range from handheld combi-set tools to larger engine-driven units and even hydraulic digger attachments.

These can help with heavy-duty cleaning, especially on brick or cobble paving, reducing the effort needed for manual brushing.

### Power washing

While weeds and most moss can be easily removed, algae, certain ground hugging mosses, and lichen may require more frequent attention and effort.

Power washing is an effective way to

clean paving, especially when dealing with stubborn growth.

Using water is one of the safest ways to clean paving. Occasionally, people use household cleaning products without considering the environmental impact. Run-off from cleaning solutions can seep into soils so it's preferable to employ water alone.

For best results, use a power washer with a pressure of 2,500 PSI or higher. The nozzle type matters too: hooded rotary head cleaners are safer and more efficient. They cover larger areas and prevent flying debris.

Avoid using full pressure directly on softer paving surfaces like sandstone as this can damage both the surface

and jointing material.

Always check with your paving supplier to ensure it is suitable for power washing. Bear in mind that power washing won't remove stubborn stains, such as oil or rust.

When using a power washer, you should be able to clean about one square metre every three to five minutes, not including setup and clean-up time.

### Re-jointing paving

If your paving joints are cracked or loose, it's a good idea to address the issue before it turns into a trip hazard.

The most efficient way to remove damaged jointing is with a consaw or angle grinder. When cutting, be sure to wet down the area to reduce dust and always wear the correct personal protective equipment (PPE).

Cutting paving materials generates Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS), a harmful substance that can cause serious lung issues if inhaled.

Once the damaged jointing is removed, clean the joint recess down to the base of the paving slab (usually 15-25mm). After cleaning, repoint the joints with fresh material and wash off any excess.

With these simple steps, you can keep your paving in great condition, ensuring both safety and visual appeal in your outdoor space.



People sometimes use household products, without consider the environmental impact but run-off from cleaning solutions can seep into soils so it's preferable to employ water alone



# ORGANICS TRAINING COURSES

This course will equip you with the knowledge, skill and competence to apply organic farming principles to the production of organic produce, to meet market requirements and approved organic standards in compliance with European Union & Irish legislation.

On successful completion of the course, participants will be able to:

- Outline the origin and development of the organic movement including the diversity of organic approaches and the range of certifying bodies
- Explain the principles of organic production
- Outline the procedures involved in converting from a non-organic to an organic production system
- Describe organic soil fertility practices
- Outline general standards for organic production
- Describe weed, pest and disease control in organic crops
- Plan a production programme to organic standards in accordance with conversion principles
- Complete the documentation required for conversion to an organic production system
- Describe soil amelioration techniques with organic production
- Manage a crop using organic principles
- Outline the key aspects of an organic production plan
- Assess the economic viability and market opportunities for organic production including EU and national supports

Scan code to register!



Pat Maher, Tipperary

“For me, going Organic was a lifestyle change, not a retirement option. It's important to do the course in time as I found there was a lot to learn. The specifications for organic take time to sink in, so I found the course very useful to clarify what's required in order to comply with the organic standards, it makes the transition smoother as I was more familiar with the organic requirements”

## Course includes:

3 x Online Session Days - 10am to 1pm  
2 x Teagasc Office & Farm Visit Days -  
9.30am to 1pm

A 25 hour QQI Level 5 'Organic Farming Principles' course must be completed before acceptance into the Organic Farming Scheme.

Locations: Tuam, Gorey, Castlerea, Macroom, Portlaoise, Clonmel & Manorhamilton

[www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie)

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