LIFE Carbon Farming

Newsletter #10 - June 2026

Welcome to the tenth issue of the Irish newsletter for LIFE Carbon Farming.

In this edition, we highlight the Fifth European LIFE Carbon Farming Network Meeting in Strée (Modave), Belgium, all-Island Agriculture and Land Use Science Conference, and open day activity on Future Beef farm, in Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

European LIFE Carbon Farming Network in Belgium

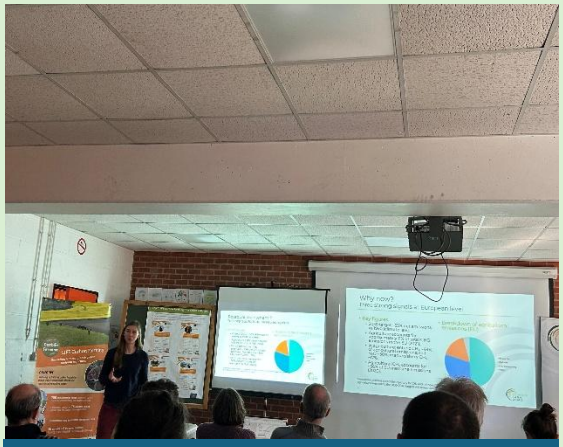
LIFE Carbon farming partners pictured discussing project milestones at the Le Centre des Technologies Agronomiques de Strée (Modave), Belgium

Seminar

The fifth European LIFE Carbon Farming network meeting took place in Huy, near Liège in Belgium, on 3rd to 4th March 2026. The morning session began with a collaborative project session, during which partners from all six countries presented their ongoing work and milestones within the LIFE Carbon Farming programme. This was followed by a technical working session, bringing together policy stakeholders, advisors, and farmers to discuss recent developments in carbon farming and its role within EU climate policy.

The seminar opened with a presentation from Valeria Forlin (European Commission, DG Clima), who provided an update on the Carbon Removal and Carbon Farming (CRCF) framework. The regulation entered into force in December 2024, and work is ongoing to develop certification approaches for carbon farming activities. Methodologies for certification are currently under consideration and are likely to be approved from 2026 onwards. A key element of the framework is the development of an EU registry for carbon credits by 2028, which will support transparency and help address risks such as double counting. The presentation also noted ongoing work to establish a Carbon Farming Buyers Club to better understand demand for carbon credits and support engagement with potential private sector buyers. In addition, the discussion touched on the concept of additionality and the need to ensure that carbon farming activities deliver measurable outcomes beyond baseline conditions.

Anaïs L'Hôte (IDELE), work package lead within the Climate Farm Demo project, outlined how current project activities are contributing to this evolving policy space. Her presentation highlighted the role of carbon farming in reducing emissions from livestock systems through a combination of mitigation actions and carbon sequestration, while maintaining production within Europe. The issue of carbon leakage was emphasised, with the risk that reducing EU livestock output without corresponding measures could lead to increased imports with higher carbon footprints.



Anaïs L'Hôte (IDELE) pictured at the seminar

In this context, she underlined the importance of developing approaches that are robust, practical, and implementable at the farm level, and that support both climate objectives and continued agricultural production.

Marc Rosiers (MR F&A Consulting) discussed methodological and structural challenges associated with integrating livestock systems into carbon farming frameworks. He noted that carbon accounting is only one element of broader farm sustainability and pointed to ongoing work at the EU level on developing a farm sustainability data network. The need for improved data systems and benchmarking tools to support decision-making, as well as questions around longer-term structural change in the livestock sector, were also raised. The seminar also included a contribution from Benoit, representing agricultural cooperatives and farmers. This talk provided a farm-level perspective on carbon farming and policy developments. Attention was drawn to the significant levels of soil organic carbon already present in permanent grassland systems and the importance of recognising this within emerging frameworks. Concerns were also raised in relation to how greenhouse gas emissions are currently assessed at the farm level and the implications for livestock production in Europe.

The seminar concluded with a presentation on carbon assessment results from a Belgian demonstration farm. This example illustrated how emission reductions and carbon sequestration can be quantified at the farm level and provided a practical context for the farm visit that followed the next day.

Farm visits

Following the seminar on the first day, participants visited a research and college farm in the Condroz region. The farm operates a mixed crop–livestock research system and is used for teaching and applied research. It is slightly smaller than the average farm size for the region (70 ha). A range of environmental measures is in place, including approximately 4 km of hedgerows and an orchard of traditional fruit varieties, contributing to biodiversity and carbon sequestration. Diverse multi-species swards have been established to

improve soil health and forage quality, while areas of the farm are managed organically. Ongoing trials include work on feed additives and dietary strategies to reduce methane emissions, as well as studies on animal performance and heat stress. The farm provides a useful case study for testing and evaluating mitigation measures under practical conditions.

On the second day, the group visited a suckler beef farm near Namurs, which combines cropping and livestock production. The production system is typical of the region, with Belgian Blue cows all carefully managed to calve through caesarean section. Male calves are finished as bulls at approximately 18 months of age and reach liveweights of around 650 kg, with dressing percentages in the range of 70–72%. The farm is working towards improved feed self-sufficiency, including reducing reliance on imported soybean meal and exploring the potential to grow protein crops. While several efficiency measures are in place, the farmer noted limited incentives for lower-emission production and highlighted the difficulty of securing price premiums through the supply chain. This reflects a broader challenge in linking farm-level mitigation actions with market-based rewards.

A dairy farm close to Meux provided a contrasting climatic and system approach, combining intensive milk production with a significant arable enterprise. The cropping system is very productive, with yields of around 10 t/ha for winter wheat. Notably, the farm has no permanent grassland area. Dairy cows receive, on average, approximately 6.5 kg of concentrate per day, alongside a forage-based diet of maize and grass silage. The owner of the farm has invested in infrastructure and technology, including robotic milking and feeding systems and on-farm photovoltaic energy. Renewable energy is used across the farm, including for crop storage, while digestate from anaerobic digestion is utilised to reduce reliance on chemical fertilisers. Participation in a cooperative sustainability scheme provides a payment linked to environmental and social actions, while improvements in efficiency have also contributed to enhancing farm performance.

The final visit was to an organic suckler system in the Gaume region bordering the Ardennes. The farm is located within a Natura 2000 area and characterised by extensive permanent grassland. The farm has been managed organically for almost three decades and relies largely on home-grown forage, with limited use of external inputs. A Limousin suckler herd is managed in a low-input system with animals typically sold at 8 months of age as weanlings. The system incorporates significant hedgerow networks and agroforestry features, contributing to biodiversity and long-term carbon storage. In addition, the farmer actively manages on-farm tree resources, harvesting trees to supply a boiler system for home heating, with surplus wood sold as fuel or processed for mulching in nurseries. This farm highlights the role of permanent pasture systems in carbon sequestration, while also illustrating the challenge of ensuring that such systems are appropriately recognised within emerging carbon accounting and certification frameworks.

Across the farms visited, a wide range of measures were observed to reduce emissions and enhance carbon sequestration. These included

improvements in feeding strategies, increased use of home-grown feeds, renewable energy generation, biodiversity measures, and changes in land management. While the farms differed considerably in structure and intensity, the visits highlighted both the diversity of approaches available and the importance of farm-specific solutions in the implementation of carbon farming.

European project partners and participating farmers visiting a mixed-crop dairy farm in Belgium involved in LIFE Carbon Farming.

New All-Island Agriculture and Land Use Science Conference

The inaugural Agriculture and Land Use Conference took place in Portlaoise on 26–27th May 2026. Organised by Teagasc in collaboration with AFBI and academic partners, and jointly supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland, the conference provided a forum to present and discuss current research on sustainable agricultural and land use systems. The programme focused on scientific insights across areas such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, soil health, and the development of resilient farming systems.

The LIFE Carbon Farming project was presented at the conference through two poster contributions. The first focused on a livestock carbon farming case study based on the Teagasc Future Beef Programme. This work outlines the approach used to establish baseline carbon audits, develop farm-level action plans, and project greenhouse gas emission reductions. The results demonstrate the potential to reduce the carbon footprint of beef production systems through a combination of mitigation measures. Some actions implemented on farms, such as hedgerow planting, also contribute to increasing carbon stocks, further strengthening the overall climate benefit of these systems. The work also highlighted variation in outcomes across farms, reflecting differences in system characteristics and the adoption of mitigation measures.

Bright Ketadzo receiving best poster award at the conference

The second poster presented findings from a survey examining company-level interest in engaging with carbon farming through different funding models. The survey explored firms' willingness to support carbon farming initiatives and their preferences for different business model structures, including offsetting, insetting, and cooperative-led approaches. The findings indicate that, while there is interest in supporting agricultural carbon farming, several barriers remain, particularly in relation to policy uncertainty, costs, and the practical challenges associated with monitoring, reporting, and verification. At the same time, motivations such as corporate climate targets, cost considerations, and reputational factors were identified as key drivers of engagement.

Together, these contributions highlight both the technical considerations associated with delivering emission reductions on farms and the emerging role of private sector participation in supporting carbon farming activities. The conference provided an opportunity to present this work within a scientific setting and to engage with a broad range of stakeholders involved in advancing research and policy in sustainable agriculture. The next conference in this series is planned for May 2028 at Trinity College Dublin.

Future Beef Open Day on John Pringle's farm

On the 29th of May 2026, a Future Beef open day was held on John Pringle's farm at Sunnyhill, near Aughrim, Co. Wicklow. The evening event attracted a strong attendance and provided an opportunity to showcase one of Ireland's top-performing suckler-to-beef systems. The farm walk focused on key aspects of production and profitability, alongside wider sustainability considerations relevant to Irish beef systems.

John Pringle farms 59 hectares and operates one of the most profitable suckler systems in the country. In 2025, the system delivered close to €4,500 per hectare in beef output, while maintaining tight control on costs to achieve a net margin before premia of €1,457 per hectare. As outlined during the event, this level of performance is driven by a combination of strong technical efficiency and disciplined cost management, particularly in areas such as grass utilisation, breeding performance, and overall system efficiency. These factors underpin both the economic and environmental performance of the farm.

Throughout the walk, advisors and programme staff outlined the key practices contributing to this performance. These included maintaining soil fertility, optimising grazing management, and achieving high levels of animal performance from forage-based systems. As demonstrated in previous farm walk events, improvements in technical efficiency — such as reducing the delay in age at first calving and increasing grass utilisation — can contribute to lower emissions intensity while also enhancing farm profitability.

John Pringle pictured delivering talks about his farm management strategies to farmers and other stakeholders.

The LIFE Carbon Farming project was also presented at the event, with a focus on recent work carried out with Future Beef farmers. This included results from baseline carbon audits and the development of farm-specific action plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance carbon stocks. Key mitigation measures outlined included the use of protected urea, improved manure management, grassland management, and soil fertility. On the Pringle farm, the baseline footprint was estimated at approximately 13.2 kg CO_2 per kg of liveweight, with a target to lower this by over 10% over five years. This is equivalent to avoiding approximately 120 tonnes of CO_2 based on carbon projections using the Carbon Agri-method.

Moreover, information was provided on ongoing work examining potential approaches to fund carbon farming. This included various insetting or offsetting models currently being considered within the project. Based on current carbon projections, this could represent a potential carbon income of around €4,000 over the project period. The event highlighted how high-performing suckler-to-beef systems can deliver both strong economic returns and improved environmental performance. It also provided an opportunity to demonstrate how carbon farming approaches, supported by robust monitoring and reporting systems such as AgNav and emerging funding mechanisms, could be integrated into commercial farm systems.

Upcoming Events

The Ireland chapter of the EU LIFE carbon program will be attending BEEF26 on July 1, 2026, at Teagasc Animal and Grassland Research Centre, Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath. The theme is 'Driving Sustainable Performance'. It will showcase the latest innovations, research, technologies, and actionable solutions to support a profitable, sustainable, and resilient future for the beef industry. This biennial event aims to attract advisors, researchers, farmers, and policy actors from across the country.

See you in the next issue.

Newsletter compiled by Bright Ketadzo and edited by Dr. Donal O'Brien, Teagasc, CELUP, Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford.

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