

# Irish Grassland Association

Members' Information Booklet

Issue No. 52. 2023



**“To advance the knowledge of good grassland management in Irish farming”**



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Corporate membership commences on the 1st January annually.  
Standard membership is deducted from all IGA members via direct debit on an annual basis.

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## Editorial



Philip Cosgrave  
Editor and IGA Council Member

### Welcome to the IGA Winter 2023 Information newsletter.

Welcome to our Winter issue of the information newsletter, which we hope you'll find informative. I have taken over the editor's position from Michael Egan who we must thank for having done a tremendous job over the last couple of years. I'll endeavour to keep up the high standards set by Michael and previous editors of this information newsletter.

First up in this newsletter, we have Maura Callery, IGA office manager extraordinaire who will cover September's AGM. Maura will update us on changes to council, including those who have joined council for the first time and those retiring off council who have all contributed hugely to the continued success of the IGA during their terms of office.

Our events review and preview section is as usual very busy with great content from our contributing council members who have put pen to paper. Fiona McGovern covers the very successful Sheep event held on Eddie Connell's farm in Offaly, while Declan Marren gives us an excellent summary of

the Beef event held on Chris McCarthy's suckler farm in Crookedwood, Co. Westmeath. Our new IGA president, Bryan Hynes fills us in on July's Dairy Extravaganza which was made up of a farm visit and BBQ on Monday evening followed by the ever-popular Dairy Summer tour on Tuesday. Mary McEvoy previews the student event, in Gortnahoo, Co. Tipperary, and finally, I preview the upcoming Dairy Conference and Social Night in January.

Our technical section has three contributors this winter. Vet Laura Schneider begins in her article by saying that housing cattle should be 'as stress free as possible for both the animals and the farmer' and Laura goes on to give great advice on how achieve this in the run up to housing. Leaving animal husbandry for financial husbandry, AIB's Barry Hyland writes on managing farm cash flow as cost inflation bites. Have you heard of virtual fencing and how much do you know about it? Well, we have new IGA council member and AFBI grassland scientist, Conor Holohan who is researching virtual fencing explain how it operates and has it got promise.

In our last section, outgoing president Alan Kelly reflects on a very busy year for the IGA and on his own presidency. In memory of a special friend of the IGA, Matt O'Keeffe and George Ramsbottom, pay tribute to Cathal Moran, an exceptional farmer and long-standing member of the IGA who died earlier in the year.

In our next issue we'll hear from IGA president Bryan Hynes, as well as having two new student contributors to our 'Year in my Wellies' section and many more interesting articles besides.

Philip Cosgrave,  
Editor IGA publication.

### SUGGESTIONS & FEEDBACK PLEASE!

If you have any suggestions for the members information booklet or any particular topics or features you would like us to include in our forthcoming issues, please send them via email to [office@irishgrassland.ie](mailto:office@irishgrassland.ie). We would love to hear from you!



**Irish Grassland Association**

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**Members Event  
9th January 2024**

**Dairy Conference  
10th January 2024**

**Sheep Event  
May**

**Beef Event  
June**

**Dairy Extravaganza  
July**

**AGM  
September**

**Autumn Event  
October**

**Dairy Conference 2025  
7th and 8th January**



*Meet the IGA team for 2023/2024*

## The 2023 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association

**Maura Callery**  
IGA Director  
and Office Manager



The 2023 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) took place on the 14th of September in the Mullingar Park Hotel.

A presentation of the year's activities was given to all by the outgoing President Alan Kelly. He thanked Mary McEvoy, Karina Pierce and Terry Carroll on their retirement from the council. Alan Kelly then welcomed the incoming President for 2023/4 Bryan Hynes.



**Mary McEvoy**  
IGA Past Council Member  
and Germinal Seeds



**Karina Pierce**  
IGA Past Council Member  
and UCD



**Terry Carroll**  
IGA Past Council Member  
and Teagasc

Bryan Hynes took over as the newly elected President. He gave a speech to all in attendance outlining the outstanding leadership and comraderie of Alan Kelly during his term as IGA President. John Farrell AIB and beef/sheep Farmer was announced as the new Vice President of the IGA.



**THE IGA EXECUTIVE**

*Back Row: L-R John Farrell IGA Vice President, Bryan Hynes IGA President, Alan Kelly IGA Director and Immediate Past President. Front Row: L-R Christy Watson IGA Past President, Maura Callery IGA Director and Office Manager.*

Bryan Hynes then welcomed his chosen co-opted members to strengthen his council during his presidential term. Conor Holohan AFBI, Tom Coll Teagasc and Aidan Murray Teagasc. They will all serve one year on the team.

Ciaran Mulligan and David Lawrence were deemed elected to council following a one-year co-opted term on the IGA council and will now serve their first full term on the council of three years. Ed Payne, Vincent Griffith, Christy Watson and Niall Claffey were all deemed re-elected onto the IGA council after vacating their seats following a fully completed term, they will all serve a second three-year term on council.

The plans for upcoming twelve months were discussed at the meeting. The following council members were appointed as chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons for the year ahead.

Editorial committee:	Chairperson: Philip Cosgrave	Vice Chairperson: Declan Marren
Sheep committee:	Chairperson: Christy Watson	Vice Chairperson: Tom Coll
Beef committee:	Chairperson: Paddy Casey	Vice Chairperson: Ken Graham
Dairy Conference:	Chairperson: Vincent Griffith	Vice Chairperson: Liz Duffy
Dairy Summer Tour:	Chairperson: Patrick Gowing	Vice Chairperson: Eamonn Sheehan
Student committee:	Chairperson: David Lawrence	Vice Chairperson: Aidan Murray

Our council members include some of the most progressive Irish agri-business personnel, agricultural scientists, consultants and highly efficient beef, sheep, and dairy farm producers. On behalf of the new IGA President Bryan Hynes and the IGA Council, we would like to thank you, our loyal farming and corporate members for your overwhelming interest and continued support. We would also like to thank everyone else involved in running our organisation, the speakers at our conferences, those who make generous contributions to our publications, our host families, and our long-standing sponsors.

We look forward to meeting you all very soon again in 2024.

## New Council Members 2023/2024



**Aidan Murray**

Aidan began working with Teagasc in 1995 as a Dairy adviser in Clonmel and then as a Drystock adviser in Carndonagh before moving to Grange Research centre in 1997 to take up a role as a Beef Specialist tasked with developing Beef Discussion groups. In 2008 he took up the role of Programme Manager setting up and developing the Teagasc/Farmers Journal Better Farm Programme. Since 2014 he has been responsible for providing beef advisers with technical training and Discussion Group development. He has a keen interest in grassland, breeding and animal health and he currently sits on the BVD Implementation Group with Animal Health Ireland.



**Conor Holohan**

Conor is a Senior Grassland Scientist at the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI), based in Hillsborough Co. Down. He grew up on a suckler beef farm in Scotstown, Co. Monaghan and worked on local dairy and poultry farms before receiving his degree in agriculture at Dundalk IT (DkIT) in 2015. He then went on to study a masters in Agricultural Innovation and Support at UCD. His research was focused on farmer discussion groups and the development of a facilitation guide for farm advisors. During this time, he spent 18 months working as a Teagasc Dairy and Drystock Advisor in Tullamore Co. Offaly and undertook a 3-month study period at Massey

University in New Zealand. He later completed a PhD in dairy and grassland production at UCD, which assessed the potential of zero-grazing as a management tool on Irish dairy farms. Conor joined AFBI in 2021 and his research is centred on pasture production and management, with a particular focus on precision technologies. He currently leads a research programme on virtual fencing and is involved in a number of projects utilising the Precision Grassland Platform at Hillsborough. In 2022 he received the US-Ireland Fulbright Award for Agriculture, Food, and Environment and spent 6 months working as a visiting researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



**Tom Coll**

Tom is a Teagasc drystock adviser based in Mohill, Co. Leitrim. He has worked with dairy, beef, and sheep discussion groups in south Leitrim and Sligo since 1995. He also facilitates a contract heifer rearing discussion group and has clients who contract rear male progeny from the dairy herd for both ICBF and the Teagasc EveryCalf project. He has a keen interest in grassland management especially on difficult soil types and in animal health across all enterprises. Tom also runs a prolific mid-season lambing ewe flock with his wife Carmel in south Leitrim.



# Meet the Team of the newly formed IGA CLG Council 2023/2024



**Bryan Hynes**  
IGA President and Dairy Farmer



*Alan Kelly, Outgoing President of the IGA receiving a presentation from newly elected President Bryan Hynes.*



Alan Bohan  
IGA Council Member and Teagasc



Alan Kelly  
IGA Past President and UCD



Aidan Murray  
IGA Council Member and Teagasc



Christy Watson  
IGA Past President 2021/22



Ciaran Lynch  
IGA Past President 2018/19 and Teagasc



Ciaran Mulligan  
IGA Council Member and Dairy Farmer



Conor Holohan  
IGA Council Member and AFBI



David Lawrence  
IGA Council Member and Brett Brothers



Declan Marren  
IGA Council Member and Aurivo Co Op



Eamon Sheehan  
IGA Council Member and Dairy Farmer



Ed Payne  
IGA Council Member and Dairy Farmer



Fiona McGovern  
IGA Council Member and Teagasc



John Farrell  
IGA Vice President Beef and Sheep Farmer AIB Bank



John Pringle  
IGA Council Member Beef and Sheep Farmer



Ken Graham  
IGA Council Member and Beef Farmer and Engineer



Liz Duffy  
IGA Council member and Teagasc



Maura Callery  
IGA Director and Office Manager



Michael Egan  
IGA Council Member and Teagasc



Niall Claffey  
IGA Council Member and Elanco Animal Health



Paddy Casey  
IGA Council Member Beef and sheep farmer



Patrick Gowing  
IGA Council Member Dairy Farmer and Teagasc



Philip Cosgrave  
IGA Council Member and Yara



Tom Coll  
IGA Council Member and Teagasc



Vincent Griffith  
IGA Council Member and Dairy Farmer



## IGA Sheep Event Review 2023

Fiona McGovern,  
IGA council member  
and Teagasc



Over 200 farmers and industry delegates attended the Irish Grassland Association sheep event on the farm of Eddie, Bernadette and Aidan Connell, Coolyagen, Clonbullogue, Co. Offaly, on Thursday 18th of May. The lush green pastures of Co. Offaly encouraged a large crowd to the farm walk which was sponsored by Mullinahone Co-Op.

### Farm System

The first board gave attendees an overview of the farm system. Eddie, Bernadette and Aidan are in a farm partnership. They farm a total of 90 ha, 65 ha of owned land plus an additional 25 ha of rented ground. The majority of the farm is in grass, however there is 15 ha of tillage which is used to provide feed for finishing animals. There are two main enterprises on the Connell farm: a 400 ewe mid-season lambing flock and a bull beef operation. At any one time there can be up to 200 head of cattle on the farm.

Considering the farm incorporates three enterprises they all fit seamlessly together with each one complementing the other. The 400 predominantly

Borris ewes are all mid-season lambing which gives them preference for grass supply in the spring. The flock has a maternal base with a focus on lambing ease and rearing ability. This enables clear breeding decisions with terminal (mainly Texel) rams let to all ewes. Simplifying the system is key for both Eddie and Aidan with all replacements purchased as hoggets and lambing down as 2 year olds.

The tillage enterprise is predominantly winter barley and maize. Producing their own grain on farm allows Eddie and Aidan to mix their own ration for both the bull beef animals and the ewes pre-lambing. All ewes are housed in December each year until lambing the following March, therefore producing their own straw on farm is a big advantage for the Connells.

Each year approximately 150 bulls are finished on farm. Continental weanlings are purchased at around 8 months old in the autumn, when the grazing pressure from the sheep has reduced, and sold at 18 months once they reach the desired carcass weight.

On the evening, Teagasc advisory, Terry Carroll, went

through the grassland management practices on farm with Eddie. Grazing management is a key priority on the farm with mixed grazing preferred in order to improve utilisation and maximise animal performance.

A high pregnancy scan rate is routinely achieved on farm with the majority of lambs finished from a grass only diet, thus emphasizing the importance of grazing management and operating a cost-efficient enterprise. Over 80% of the farm's soil are sitting at index 3 or 4 for both P and K with ideal pH levels across all paddocks. Having optimum soil fertility really pays off when grazed grass makes up the majority of the diet for finishing lambs.

Lambs are regularly weighed and drafted from weaning (June) onwards with over 80% of lambs sold by October each year. IGA council member Christy Watson discussed achieving optimum lamb performance with Eddie on the third stop of the evening. Lamb faecal egg count is regularly monitored with lambs receiving dosing as and when required. The high level of lamb output on the Connell farm was commended with 1.56 lambs sold per ewe equating to 32.85 kg of lamb carcass sold per ewe in 2022. This returned €220 of lamb sold per ewe lambing with an average lamb price of €141 achieved.

The final stop on the evening looked at labour efficiency on the farm with IGA council member Alan Bohan reviewing the infrastructural improvements which have been made on the farm with Aidan Connell. Aidan discussed the new sheep shed which has been recently built and the upgraded sheep handling unit which was designed to be operated by a single person. The thought process that went into designing both projects was evident with ease of feeding, moving animals and cleaning clear for all to see. Labour efficiency is very important to both Eddie and Aidan and this was obvious to see with investment in good infrastructure paying dividends to both man and beast.

Having the right animal type with good genetics, excellent grassland management and enterprises that complement one another lead to a financially profitable farm achieving high output using a simple system.



Martin Ryan CEO Mullinahone Co Op and Alan Kelly IGA Past President Making a presentation to the Connell Family



Aidan Connell speaking to delegates about his sheep handling and accommodation facilities



We would like to thank our sponsors Mullinahone Co-Op for their continued support





## IGA Beef Event Review 2023

Declan Marren  
IGA council member &  
Aurivo



This year's Irish Grassland Association Beef event took place on the farm of Chris McCarthy, Crookedwood, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath on Tuesday 13th of June. A beautiful sunny June evening perfectly reflected the quality of stock on show that evening, which was kindly sponsored by FBD insurance.

### System overview

The first board of the walk looked at the overall system and was outlined by Chris and IGA council member Christy Watson.

Chris works full-time off the farm, but the level of detail evident on the farm simply does not happen without a lot of hard work, dedication, drive, and determination. The beef system in operation on the farm is probably best described as being meticulously planned simplicity.

And, a simple system it is. The three-quarter bred Limousin cow type on farm has power, milk, calving ability, strong carcass characteristics and fits perfectly into the McCarthy's system. A terminal Charolais stock bull is used to produce top-quality U and E-grading bulls and heifers.

The 46-cow, spring calving herd calve in a tight block early in spring and get out to grass typically in February where they are rotationally grazed on a well set up paddock system where one person can move stock at

any time on their own. Well-managed swards combined with good soil fertility result in over 11 tonne DM/ha of grass being grown from relatively low chemical nitrogen inputs of 125 kg/ha (102 units/acre).

This high-quality grass is efficiently converted to live weight through a milky cow and by a calf with high genetic potential culminating in the consistent production of heavy weanlings in September, averaging 290 kg for heifers and 330 kg for bulls. Heifers are sold to a local farmer in October each year at around 320 kg to 330 kg average weight. The bulls are housed in early November at roughly 380 kg to 400 kg where they go on to be finished at under 16-months of age.

The bulls consume around 1.8 tonne of concentrate per head over their lifetime and have an average carcass weight of 478 kg at 15.9 months of age. That translates to a lifetime performance of almost 1 kg carcass/day. While these are heavy carcass weights, Chris works closely with his processor, and they know he can deliver high conformation carcasses with sufficient fat cover.

### Production figures

The farm extends to 28 ha which is all in one block. This aids labour management when moving stock around during the grazing season.

The overall stocking rate on the farm is 2.05 LU/ha. While this is almost double the national average for suckler farms, the stocking rate is not excessive with Chris coming under the 170 kg N/ha limit.

A high level of output is what is driving the entire system. There was 769 kg/ha liveweight or 374 kg/LU produced in 2022.

From a financial perspective, this translates to a gross output of €2,580 per ha and a gross margin, before any support payments of €1,283 per ha.

The second stop of the evening looked at the role of grassland and the importance of soil fertility on the farm. IGA council member Paddy Casey outlined that the McCarthy's achieve a long grazing season of over 270 days which maximises the proportion of grass in the diet and keeps production costs as low as possible in this cow-calf unit.

Indeed, grass and grass silage account for over 80% of the total feed used on the farm – considering that there is a bull beef system in operation and heifers are sold as weanlings this shows there is a high level of performance coming from grazed and conserved pasture.

Almost 90% of the farm has a soil pH of greater than 6.2. The entire farm is index 4 for P and 88% of the farm is index 3 for K. Higher fertiliser prices in recent years have seen Chris reduce the use of compound fertiliser which has resulted in soil K levels dropping on some parts of the farm, something Chris is eager to correct in the coming years.

During the main grazing season there are just two grazing groups on the farm which means two things – firstly it is easier to manage fewer groups and secondly, there is significant grazing pressure through big group numbers so that once the group enters a paddock (usually 4 acres in size) they graze them out in three days and are then moved on to a fresh paddock.

The third stop of the evening focused on animal health, both on the McCarthys farm and with more general advice being shared by UCD vet and lecturer Eoin Ryan. Chris is minimising the risk of purchasing



Alan Kelly IGA Past President and Barbara Allen FBD Branch Manager in Mullingar with the McCarthy Family

replacements by using the same few farms each year to source his stock, while the bulls are on a pneumonia vaccination protocol prior to housing in autumn to minimise the risk of pneumonia at housing time. Chris is also using the QuietWean nose paddles which he says takes the stress out of the weaning process.

The paddles are fitted to the weanling's nose, and then they're allowed out with their mother's but are unable to suckle, after four days the cows and calves are then separated. The farm is having great success with this weaning technique.

Finally, there was a stop in the bull shed where the remaining under 16-month bulls were being finished. Aidan Murray, Teagasc Beef Specialist who is no stranger to the McCarthy farm having dealt with them when they were participants of the Teagasc/Irish Farmers Journal BETTER farm programme in previous years, said that the success of the farm could not be attributed to any one thing but the sum of all the individual parts and attention to detail that set this farm apart.

The right cow for the system, good genetics that delivers high growth rates, excellent grassland management, a time efficient system, achieving high output per livestock unit and ultimately and most importantly consistently delivering a financial dividend at the end of the day.

He concluded that the farm ticks the boxes in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability which is key to the future of suckler beef production in Ireland.

We would like to thank FBD Insurance for their continued sponsorship of this event







## Farm Walk and BBQ Kicks off Dairy Summer Extravaganza

Bryan Hynes  
IGA president  
& dairy farmer



On the eve of this year's Dairy Summer tour over 300 farmers attended a farm walk with a difference in Kells, Co. Meath. Farmers attended a very informative farm walk on the farm of Mark Cassidy before heading to the Headfort Arms hotel in Kells for a barbeque. This unique event was sponsored by Yara and proved hugely popular with members.

Mark milks 380 cows producing 509kg of milk solids on 153 ha. Herd EBI is 207 with a six week in-calf rate of 83%. Farmers on the day were extremely impressed with the technical performance and labour efficiency on show. One of the main talking points was Mark's extensive list of standard operating procedures (SOP's). Every job on the farm has a written SOP and farmers were surprised to learn that there was over 170 pages in Mark's SOP folder. All employees are given a digital copy of the "Farm Procedures Book" and individual sheets are printed, laminated and displayed on the walls where needed. This triggered a lot of questions on the day. Staff on the farm highlighted the importance of having this information to hand and described it as 'vital'.

Mark's approach to human resource management is really evident, especially at calving in springtime. Mark is a big believer in planning and preparation to make

this busy period run efficiently. Key areas at calving are people and his own personal preparedness.

### People

Everyone knows their role on the farm well before calving starts. Mark has a meeting with the full team just before calving starts to familiarise everyone with and discuss the Procedures Book, and the "Daily Jobs List", and any changes can be made if needed. For milking during the calving season there are always two people in the parlour to milk the cows - once a day from the start of calving until March 1st. Their role is to milk and draft out and manage the freshly calved cows. In the calf shed, one person feeds all the calves on the farm during the spring. Mark is responsible for grassland management and newborn calf management during the springtime.

Mark highlighted how his contractor, his calf seller and contract rearer play an invaluable support role in the spring to allow his farm team to concentrate on their own work of looking after animals. Staff morale is an important element of maintaining a good workplace environment during this busy period.

### Personal preparedness

Fitness is important, and Mark trains in preparation for

the calving season. From a mental health perspective, he says that being prepared helps to reduce stress. Each year he looks back at the calving season's stress points and then puts a plan in place to prevent them from happening again. He uses a checklist to keep track of on farm preparations which start in December.

Mark points out that planning and preparation is a great motivator for him, and that he's ready, facilities are ready and that everything that will be needed for calving season is on the farm by 1st of February. This reduces the pressure on him and his team during calving season.



We would like to thank our sponsors YARA for their continued support





## Dairy Summer Tour Draws the Crowds

Bryan Hynes  
IGA president  
& dairy farmer



Over 300 farmers descended on the farms of David Brady and Owen Brodie in County Cavan in July for the IGA Dairy Summer tour sponsored by AIB. One of the main themes across both farms was how these two farmers made the most of what they had. Both farmers were dealing with varying soil types, high levels of rainfall and road crossings as everyday issues on their farm, yet both farms were technically excellent with David producing 541 kg of milk solids per cow and Eoin producing 519 kg per cow in 2022.

David and Owen referred to grass measuring as being the catalyst for improving other aspects of their farms. Common points discussed by both farmers were breeding the perfect cow, getting the most milk possible from grass, soil fertility and their views on clover. There was a good discussion on land drainage and the costs involved in doing it right. David explained that it costs him between €3,000 to €3,500 per acre to drain his fields, but they can go from being grazed four times a year to nine times, growing more grass which can then be more efficiently utilised.

### Owen Brodie

Owen attended Ballyhaise agricultural college in 1986 and bought the farm from his parents in 1989, aged 21. His parents continued their cheese making business and Owen began milking 36 cows. He said

that, while it was uncommon, purchasing the farm at such a young age worked out well and everyone in the family knew where they stood. "It took me two years to realise I needed to start making money," he said.

While being held back by milk quotas and looking for opportunities, Owen took over the management of a large dairy goat farm in 2002. He said he learned a lot in this venture and there was strong demand for goats' milk at the time. As time went on, he realised that the cow side of his business had advantages in terms of the co-op structure, independent research and farmers sharing information and he exited the goat business in 2011.

Today Owen is milking 194 cows across 77 ha, with a grazing platform of 58 ha. Owen explained that his farm is long, narrow, and hilly with walks of 2.5 kilometres. In his experience long walks hit litres more than solids and he calculates that it's lowering his milk solids by 20 kg per cow. To minimise production losses and even out the distance that his cows walk, Owen grazes the furthest paddocks from the parlour by day and the nearer paddocks by night. A farmer in attendance suggested that this can lead to more dung deposits in paddocks nearer the parlour, thus robbing the paddocks further away of nutrients. Owen confirmed that this was his experience and uses slurry

to help balance the uneven distribution of nutrients created by this system.

Milk production last year was 519 kg of milk solids at 4.7% fat and 3.78% protein from 1.1 tonne of meal. The herd is maturing and currently averages 3.6 lactations per cow. There were questions on the day whether this could be pushed much higher. Owen felt that 4 lactations per cow was possible if you can manage somatic cell count, fertility and feet. Owen emphasised the importance of cow fertility and getting young cows back in-calf.

Each spring Owen plans to graze 25% of the farm in February. By getting grass into the diet early in lactation Owen has noticed an increase in milk solids. "Grass keeps the milk up high and lets them peak" he said. Grass growth averaged 15 tonne over the last number of years. Excellent soil fertility was said to be a key driver, and it was shown that 98% of soil was at the optimum for P, 80% for K and 72% for lime.

In quota times there was clover present on the farm, but Owen didn't pay much attention to it. In recent years there has been no clover, but Owen said he started taking it seriously last year. Clover is now in the reseed programme, and he is managing it by reducing nitrogen on paddocks with high levels of clover.

### Ballyhaise clover experience

Donal Patton from Teagasc gave an update on the

ongoing clover trials in Ballyhaise which began in 2021. Donal explained that like a lot of farms Ballyhaise had no clover in their swards when the trial commenced. They attempted to incorporate clover in every paddock over a three-year period while running their commercial herd. Donal called this transition phase the "messy bit" as cows are grazing clover in one paddock and there might be no clover in the next paddock. This makes management more difficult and increases the risk of bloat.

Donal explained that bloat is the biggest worry for farmers and said it was the biggest barrier to adoption, adding that it adds another layer to the farms management. Donal's top tips for farmers looking to increase clover percentages on their farms was to keep the cows full, use bloat oil and start with a small area in clover that can be managed correctly while cutting nitrogen. Ballyhaise have used bloat oil and have had no issues with bloat. He said that full reseeds have been more successful for clover establishment, but if over-sowing then it must be done before the end of April.

### David Brady

David attended Ballyhaise College in 1996 and when he came home to farm his parents were milking 40 cows with limited opportunities for expansion. With his mind set on fulltime farming David built a 5,000-bird hen house in 1997. This enabled him to remain at home and after a tough first year learning the ropes,



IGA and AIB staff with the Brodie Family at Ryefield Virginia



Liz Duffy IGA, David Brady host farmer, Alan Kelly IGA Past President and Barry Hyland AIB

he began enjoying it. Over the years through leasing and purchasing land, David is now milking 110 cows.

David feels that while his 40 ha milking platform could take 120 cows, the land can turn wet quickly and they are never too far from having to house cows. For this reason, he is happy stocking the milking platform at 2.8 cows per ha. David's farm infrastructure includes two yards split by a road and two hen houses with 15,000 birds. He explained that it's very much a family farm with his parents, brother and kids all helping. Hens alone take six hours of work each day.

David explained that before he began grass measuring, "I didn't know what the cows were eating, yet I could tell you to the gram what the hens needed. Our milk protein was low, and the cows were grazing stemmy grass" he said. David completed a grass measuring course in Ballyhaise in 2015 and in his own words "have never looked back since".

David's cows are averaging around 560 kg liveweight and produced 541 kg of milk solids at 4.44% fat and 3.63% protein on 1.2 tonne of meal last year. "The cows are ticking all the boxes for me. I need cows that work in the shed and field. When it gets wet, it gets wet quick," he said. While happy with the litres,

David is now focusing on increasing his percentages. "The milk is there. It's solids I need to improve," he said, pointing out that his heifers have the potential to do 4% protein. He plans to pull out poor performing cows and replace them with heifers. In the breeding season, cow selection was said to be as important as bull selection with only the best cows receiving dairy straws, while the rest get beef sires.

A farmer on the day asked how milk solids jumped from 463 kg in 2019 to 555 kg in 2020. David simply replied doing the simple things right, adding that he likes to listen to people and take their advice and again cited grass measuring as the biggest step. One third of Davids soils were said to be in perfect fertility for P, K, and lime. He is going to work on improving soil fertility on the farm by replacing P and K offtakes more appropriately using slurry.

On the day, David was asked whether he might specialise in either hens or cows in the future? David said, he gets more enjoyment out of the cows but will continue with both as they work quite well together, explaining that last year was a good year for milk but not so good for eggs. He added that expansion in the hen business is unlikely considering a new 12,000-hen house would cost €850,000.

**We would like to thank AIB  
for their continued support  
#BackedbyAIB**



## A Trip to Tipp for 2023 Student Event

Dr Mary McEvoy  
IGA past council  
member & Germinal



The 2023 Irish Grassland Association Student Event, kindly sponsored by FBD insurance is taking place in Gortnahoo, Co. Tipperary. The event is open to students that have been invited from third level colleges from all over Ireland. This year, over 300 students from six colleges are expected. The event will visit 2 farms – a sheep enterprise and a dairy enterprise, where students will have the opportunity to hear the background story of the farm, their performance and future plans, allowing plenty of discussion and interaction with our two host farmers.

### Sheep Enterprise

Students will visit the farm of John Large, who runs an early March lambing flock with over 450 ewes and 100 replacements alongside 25 autumn-calved suckler cows. His land is split into two blocks. John is a strong advocate of rotational paddock grazing

and manages his grass to a very high standard. He will highlight the importance of how implementing a grassland management system on his farm has allowed him to operate a profitable productive system with low input costs. The average paddock size is 1.5 ha while temporary fencing is also used to further divide paddocks during the grazing season.

John has been involved in the Sheep Ireland Central Progeny Testing (CPT) programme since 2009. The flock is split into 2 batches with 150 ewes AI'ed and 300 in natural mating groups. Kevin McDermott from Sheep Ireland, will discuss on the day the role John plays in the CPT programme and the importance of data recording in order to validate ram genetic performance. Twenty-five rams will be used in the 2023/2024 breeding season, namely, Belclare, Texel, Charollais, Suffolk and Vendeen. A selection of female





IGA and FBD staff with host farmer John Large



IGA and FBD staff with the Ryan Family

progeny is then retained from each ram in order to further evaluate their maternal performance and longevity within the flock. This information is used by Sheep Ireland to identify the best sheep genetics regardless of breed. John sells his finished lambs directly to the processor. The target carcass weight is 20 kg. To achieve this, slower growing lambs are moved onto a crop of forage rape in October to boost growth rates and reduce finishing times.

### Dairy Enterprise

Also, farming in Gortnahoo, is John Ryan, who runs a dairy farm. John converted to dairy from Beef in 2012 and has steadily grown the herd, to its current size of 145 cows. John's father Tom is also heavily involved in the farm business. John has a milking platform of 34 ha with additional owned and rented support blocks. The milking platform is stocked at 4.12 cows/ha and is dependent on the out-blocks, for zero grazing at the shoulders of the year and if grass growth rates drop in mid-season due to drought. John is part of the Teagasc Signpost Farm Program, where he focuses on

his financial performance while also trying to improve his farms economic and environmental sustainability. On the day of the event, students will hear from John's Teagasc advisors, Darragh Kelly and Sandra Hayes, on how he manages his farm and the focus he has put on reducing his carbon footprint in recent years, through the adaptation of technologies such as LESS, protected urea, clover incorporation, reducing his use of fertiliser N and the challenges he has faced with maintaining grass growth with lower N inputs. Brigid Lynch from Teagasc will present results from the on-going trial on Johnstown Castle's dairy herd comparing grass clover swards to multispecies swards (MS). Brigid will discuss with John how he has managed MS on his farm to date. Also, up for discussion will be herd genetics, financial performance, and future goals for the farm.

Throughout the event discussion and questions from the students will be strongly encouraged to ensure that the students can take away as much information as possible and use the opportunity on these farms to question the host farmers on their farming enterprises.

We would like to thank FBD Insurance who have sponsored our student conference since its inception in 2010





## IGA Dairy Social Night - Join us for dinner and conversation with Dr Paddy Wall

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA council member  
& Yara



The IGA Dairy Social Night takes place on the eve of the Dairy Conference at the 4-star Charleville Park Hotel, in Cork on Tuesday the 9th of January. This expanded social night is back bigger than ever in January. The positive feedback and the increasing number of requests from members to facilitate a social element to the dairy conference, is testimony to the popularity and success of previous social nights. The evening will kick-off at 7:30 pm with a 3-course Gala dinner, followed by our guest speaker for the night, Dr Paddy Wall. Paddy will be interviewed by IGA's very own Laurence Sexton, dairy farmer, and former IGA council member.

Dr Paddy Wall is Professor of Public Health in UCD and is a member of UCD's Institute for Food and Health. His research areas include food safety, nutrition and managing lifestyle related disease through behavioural change. Paddy's academic career began in the UCD vet school where he qualified as a vet followed by a degree in Human Medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland.

Paddy has had an impressive career; he was head

of the Foodborne Diseases Division of the UK CDC before he was made the first Chief Executive of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland in 1998. He is a former chairperson of the European Food Safety Authority. He advised the Chinese government on food safety issues for the 2008 Beijing Olympics and still sits on a committee in the Chinese equivalent of the European Food Safety Authority. Paddy still holds several national and international advisory positions and is a director of AgriAware and is chairperson of Independent Milk Laboratories.

This promises to be an excellent evening with thought provoking and insightful conversation with our guest speaker, but equally an opportunity to relax and enjoy ourselves ahead of a busy spring. Tickets for this Gala dinner cost €45 per person or a table of 10 people for €390 and must be purchased directly with the Charleville Park Hotel, on 063 33700. The hotel can display your corporate name/logo or discussion group name/logo on the centre of the table for those booking an entire table. Places are limited for this event, so early booking is a must to avoid disappointment.



## Patrick Wall, Professor Public Health UCD

Dr Patrick Wall is Professor of Public Health in UCD and is a member of UCD's Institute for Food and Health. His research areas include food safety, nutrition and managing lifestyle related disease through behavioural change. Paddy's academic career began in the UCD vet school where he qualified as a vet followed by a degree in Human Medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland. He holds an MSc in Infectious Diseases from University of London and an MBA from the Michael Smurfit School of Business UCD and a Diploma in Corporate Governance from the UCD Centre of Corporate Governance.

Paddy has had an impressive career; he was head of the Foodborne Diseases Division of the UK CDC before he was made the first Chief Executive of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland in 1998. He is a founder member of the management board and former chairperson of the European Food Safety Authority. He advised the Chinese government on food safety issues for the 2008 Beijing Olympics and still sits on a committee in the Chinese equivalent of the European Food Safety Authority. Paddy still holds several national and international advisory positions and is a director of Agri-Aware and is chairperson of Independent Milk Laboratories.





## IGA Dairy Conference 2024 Preview

Philip Cosgrave  
IGA council member  
and Yara



The annual IGA Dairy Conference takes place on Wednesday, the 10th of January next in the Charleville Park Hotel. With eight excellent speakers lined up to present and discuss a number of important topics that will have an important influence on your dairy farm business in 2024. The title for this year's conference is 'Focusing on our strengths'. The three conference sessions will focus on managing low milk prices, cow lameness, milk quality, calf rearing and a panel discussion with three young dairy farmers outlining their views on sustainability, managing labour and career progression in dairying. The organising committee is always keen to have dairy farmers tell their stories, and this January's conference is no exception with five farmers speaking on areas in which they excel. We would like to thank Yara for their long running sponsorship of this important national dairy event.

### Session 1: Managing Challenging Milk Prices

Milk price has been a standout issue on dairy farms throughout 2023, and in this first session chaired by IGA council member Patrick Gowing, our two speakers will tackle this topic head on. Tadhg Buckley from the IFA will delve into the international milk markets explaining what is underpinning current milk prices and offer expert advice on how to scrutinise and

analyse variable and fixed costs on our farms. GD Young has a unique background, having been a dairy farmer in Scotland and now in Ireland. He will compare and contrast his low-cost grass based system that he operates now with his former high output/high input type system that he operated in Scotland. GD will also outline what he's done differently on his farm over the last 12 months to manage tighter margins.

Tadhg Buckley is our first speaker in this session. Tadhg is from a farming background and is the current Director of Policy/Chief Economist with the Irish Farmers Association (IFA). Prior to joining the IFA, Tadhg worked in the finance industry as Head of Agriculture with AIB Bank. He holds a Degree in Agricultural Science from UCD as well as an MBA from University of Limerick. Tadhg is also a Nuffield Scholar - his study examined the role of dairy futures markets & other price risk management mechanisms in the EU Dairy Industry. He is also a member of the Agricultural Science Association and a Qualified Financial Advisor. Tadhg continues to be actively involved in dairy farming on his home farm in North Cork.

Our second speaker for this session is GD Young, who is farming with his wife Caroline and their three children in Westmeath, milking 400 cows. GD grew up in Scotland and began his farming career in the mid 90's when he

returned home to work on the family farm milking 120 cows. In the late 90's the opportunity came to buy his uncle out who was milking 100 cows, and this allowed them to amalgamate the two herds to improve labour efficiency. Cow output steadily increased to 9,500 litres per cow on a high input system. Poor returns and difficulty in finding labour led them to quit dairying and convert to sheep and sucklers in 2011. They set up their own brand 'Argyll Angus' to help market their own beef by targeting the local tourist market. In 2015 they purchased their current farm after selling their farms in Scotland to start up a new dairy enterprise in Ireland.

### Session 2: Getting it right this Spring: Health and Milk Quality

Herd health and milk quality are two critical areas to get right in the spring on any dairy farm. To steer us on the right path this spring, we will be joined by Waterford vet, Ger Cusack who will discuss the impact that cow lameness can have on the herd and how can we reduce lameness on farms. Our second speaker is milk quality expert Don Crowley, and his paper will focus on getting milk quality right from the start of lactation, controlling milk cell counts and reducing mastitis levels in the herd. Our final speaker is Meath dairy farmer Laura Hannon who will outline her farms approach to herd health and particularly calf health and calf rearing. The chair for this session will be Niamh Bambrick (ASA President & Mullinahone Co-op).

Ger Cusack is up first in this session. Ger graduated from UCD Veterinary College in 1982. A practicing vet at Comeragh Veterinary, a mixed, mainly dairy cattle practice, based in Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford. He also has a Certificate in Dairy Herd Health from 2015. He is a member of Animal Health Ireland's newly formed 'Hoof Health Check Technical Working Group'. He is a Member of the Veterinary Council of Ireland and is founder chairman of XLVets Ireland, a company providing networking support to independent veterinary practices throughout Ireland. He has worked with Muireann Conneely of Teagasc, to produce the "Reducing Lameness in Irish Dairy Herds" booklet in 2022. Ger is also a director of Greenway Agritraining, a company dedicated to the delivery of practical, hands-on training to farmers and others in the farming sector, focusing on hoof care and the prevention of lameness in dairy herds.

Following on from Ger's presentation, we have Don Crowley who is the Milk Quality Specialist Advisor in Teagasc. Don completed his Degree in Agricultural Science in 1994 from UCD. He worked for more than ten years with Riverview Veterinary group in Bandon

## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

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**Owen Ashton:** Owen is farming in a cow leasing/contract milking deal with Kevin and Margaret Twomey in Castlelyons, Co. Cork. He graduated with a BSc Agriculture from Aberystwyth University in 2013, after which he gained valuable experience working on large scale dairy farms in New Zealand, Wales, and Ireland.



Not from a dairy farming background, he has always had a passion for dairy farming, and this partnership with the Twomey's has allowed him to realise his goal. Owen purchased his first stock in 2015 and has since grown his herd whilst working alongside Kevin to 160 cows plus followers. They are currently milking 185 high EBI cross bred cow on a 57 ha milking platform with winter feed coming from an outside block. In 2022, they sold 467 kg MS/cow, at 4.62% fat and 3.79% protein. Owen has a strong focus on producing high quality milk from a grass based production system, with a good work life balance.

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Co. Cork where he held roles as an Agri-Advisor and practice Manager, before joining Teagasc. He began his current Milk Quality Specialist role in 2006 with Teagasc, based in Clonakilty, as part of the Teagasc/Dairygold joint programme. His role is now expanded, where he provides key advisory support to milk suppliers and advisors in the joint programmes that Teagasc run with Dairygold, Kerry & Carbery Co-ops. A native of Co. Cork, Don and his wife Michelle run a successful dairy farm in Ballineen and supply milk to Lisavaird Co-op.

The last speaker in this session will be Laura Hannon, who is dairy farming in partnership with her parents in Co. Meath. Laura qualified as a general nurse in 2017 and worked in Beaumont hospital until May 2019, when she returned home to farm. She completed the Green Cert in 2019 by distance learning and then enrolled on a part-time Degree in Agriculture, which she graduated from in 2023. The family partnership is currently milking 320 cows. In 2020, they ceased contract rearing and now rear approximately 80 calves and 80 heifers on a leased out-farm. Animal health is a priority area for Laura, and together with her father they work closely with their vets to create a herd health plan that is relevant and practical for their farm. Working with their vets has helped them to significantly decrease the farm's antibiotic and anthelmintic use. Laura recently won the 'Animal Health Dairy Farmer of the Year' award.

### Session 3: Managing a system to suit your business

The afternoon session will take the shape of a panel discussion with IGA council member Michael Egan as chair. Making up this panel, we have three young dairy farmers David Dolan, Owen Ashton and Mark Collins. David will outline his journey and future plans on improving his farms environmental sustainability and how he has been steadily reducing N usage through incorporating white clover in his swards. Owen Ashton has a very interesting story to tell, he's not from a dairy farming background and has had an unconventional pathway into dairy farming through an equity partnership. Mark Collins will explain why he has implemented a 10 in 7 milking frequency and how creating a good working environment for staff is good for business. To learn more about our three panellists, read their short biographies below.

David Dolan farms alongside his parents Louis and Bernie near Claremorris, Co. Mayo. The 50 ha farm carries 110 crossbred cows. The farm has undergone significant change over the last 6 years going from a split calving high output system with multiple out blocks, to a spring calving medium output system on a single block. In 2022, the calving interval was 370 days,

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**David Dolan:** David farms alongside his parents Louis and Bernie near Claremorris, Co. Mayo. The 50 ha farm carries 110 crossbred cows. The farm has undergone significant change over the last 6 years going from a split calving high output system with multiple out blocks, to a spring calving medium output system on a single block. In 2022, the calving interval was 370 days, and the six-week calving rate was 86%, producing 520 kg of milk solids per cow supplying Aurivo Co-op. David is focusing on reducing the environmental impact of the farm and making more room for biodiversity. 20% of the farm is now in high clover swards with plans to introduce multi-species swards in 2024. David has just completed his Nuffield Scholarship, titled 'Net Zero Emissions Farming: Challenges and Opportunities for farmers and co-ops'.



**Mark Collins:** Mark is farming in Tipperary in partnership with his parents, Pdraig and Ena. He graduated from UCD in 2020 with a Degree in Agricultural Science in Dairy Business. The partnership is milking 450 crossbred cows on 170 ha with a 10 ha out block and all youngstock are contracted reared. Mark has a strong focus on a simple efficient system that produces quality milk solids from resilient pasture in a sustainable manner, and this year he implemented a 10 in 7 milking rota. He aims to grow more multi-species and grass-clover swards to reduce chemical fertiliser use and improve soil health and breed high EBI crossbred cows that are efficient at converting grass to milk solids. Alongside Mark and his parents, there are 2 other full-time staff members and occasional part-time help. There is a strong emphasis on keeping a positive working environment, to achieve the farm's goals and the personal development of staff.



**Laura Hannon:** Laura Hannon is 28 years old and dairy farming in partnership with her parents in Co. Meath. Laura qualified as a general nurse in 2017 and worked in Beaumont hospital until May 2019, when she returned home to farm. She completed the Green Cert in 2019 by distance learning and then enrolled on a part-time Degree in Agriculture, which she graduated from in 2023. The family partnership is currently milking 320 cows. In 2020, they ceased contract rearing and now rear approximately 80 calves and 80 heifers on a leased out-farm. Animal health is a priority area for Laura, and together with her father they work closely with their vets to create a herd health plan that is relevant and practical for their farm. Working with their vets has helped them to significantly decrease the farm's antibiotic and anthelmintic use. Laura recently won the 'Animal Health Dairy Farmer of the Year' award.



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## Getting to Grips with Farm Cash Flow

Barry Hyland  
AIB Agri Advisor, Cavan & Monaghan



Last year will be remembered as a good year on most farms. Yes, input costs increased, and we experienced a summer drought, but by in large, the increase in output costs were sufficient to offset higher input costs and this was reflected in higher incomes across most farm sectors.

Fast forward 12 months and things have changed dramatically. Input costs remain high (albeit there has been some movement downwards), we had record rainfall in March, output prices are on a downward trend across most sectors, interest rates have increased, farm incomes will be down and farmers are facing higher tax liabilities on the back of last year.

The next few months will be more difficult than the last, and there are some other challenges that the sector will have to adopt to, but fundamentally the long-term outlook for the sector remains strong and it is important that farmers manage their farm cash flow over the next few months to get through this period.

In general, farmers are entering this period in a good position, with Overdraft utilisation levels at their lowest levels in several years. Deposits for primary industries which includes farmers, as reported by the Central Bank of Ireland in March were 15% ahead of a year earlier,

and overall farm debt levels have continued their downward trend and are under €2.8 billion, significantly below the peak a number of years ago.

While financial and cash flow management may not necessarily get the time and effort it deserves on all farms, it is important to get a handle on farm cash flow over the coming months to help identify if support is required and if so, how much. The best way to do that is to develop a cash flow budget for the next few months.

### Looking back to look forward

The best place to start is last year. Examine the income and expenses incurred during the same months last year and account for any known changes. Be that an increase in stock numbers, an increase or decrease in output price, and in some instances an increased tax liability. Bank statements, cheque books and a lodgement book are the key things required. While it will be very much an estimate, you will quickly see the differences that start to emerge from the previous year. The budget can be as simple or as detailed as you like, but the important thing is to take some time to review your position and get a handle on it.

Once you estimate what the financial effect may be, and if there is a cash flow deficit you can start to look at the

options available to you. If bank support is required, the options available could include one or a combination of the below. Talk to your bank sooner rather than later and do some analysis beforehand, along the line of what is outlined above, as it will be well worthwhile.

- An increase in working capital facilities - such as an Overdraft or a Credit Line. They will provide an immediate cash injection to the business to meet farm expenses.
- Retrospectively fund farm capital expenditure. 2022 was a good year for most farms which resulted in some investment taking place from cash flow. In most instances where receipts are available for the work, this can be refinanced over an appropriate term for the investment with the loan used to replenish any cash flow deficit.
- Spread tax liability over a longer term. Last year was a strong year for farm incomes and tax liabilities will have increased on most farms. There are short term options available to allow you to spread your tax liability over an 11-month period.
- Short term loan. There are a number of short-term loan options available including some SBCI facilities via your Bank which may be appropriate.

The important thing is to put actions in place if support is required. You are better off to know today that you

will run into a cash flow deficit and plan for it, rather than hoping it won't be an issue and subsequently running into cash flow difficulty later in the year or early next Spring.

The other thing to do once you have completed your cash flow plan, is to continue to monitor it monthly and amend and update as appropriate. This will ensure you have the most up to date information to ensure your farm business can continue to run smoothly, or you can make changes or seek support as required.

### In summary

No two years are the same in farming with the effects of high costs, reducing output prices and higher tax bills coming to the fore in 2023. A little more time and effort needs to be devoted to financial management, and in particular cash flow management. Take the time now to ensure you have sufficient funds and or working capital available to ensure that you don't run into any cash flow difficulties later in the year. As mentioned earlier, it can be as simple or as detailed as you like, but the important thing is to take action.

*Lending criteria, terms and conditions apply. Credit facilities are subject to repayment capacity and financial status and are not available to persons under 18 years of age. Security may be required. Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c. is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.*







## Pre-housing Checklist for Cattle

Laura Schneider  
MVB



Winter housing deadlines in Ireland can be unpredictable so it's a good idea to create a checklist of jobs that need to be completed to make housing cattle as stress free as possible for both the animals and the farmer. First on our pre-housing checklist should be the housing itself. Power washing the inside of all buildings should be carried out well in advance of cattle being brought in and all houses should be disinfected also. When selecting a disinfectant, it is important to take into consideration the previous diseases diagnosed on farm as this can help reduce the prevalence and risk of these diseases reoccurring. For example, certain disinfectants will reduce the prevalence of cryptosporidium in calf sheds and in calving pens resulting in a reduced burden on newly born calves later in the spring. General maintenance should be carried out on sheds at this time and it's a good idea to create a 'to do list' to ensure small jobs aren't overlooked. Items that need to be replaced or repaired should also be put on this list for the same reason. Stocks of forage and meal should be forecasted where possible to prevent any sudden change in diets especially for cows heavy in-calf.

Other factors to consider are stocking density and mixing new groups of animals. If there has been an increase in the numbers of certain age groups of cattle whilst out at grass, will there now be enough space

for these extra animals when housed? According to Teagasc, suckler cows housed in slatted houses require 2.5-3.0 m<sup>2</sup>/cow, while cattle weighing over 275 kg require 2.0-2.5 m<sup>2</sup>/animal, and dairy cows a cubicle per cow. Weanlings or cattle weighing under 275 kg are required to have 1.2-1.5 m<sup>2</sup>/animal. In straw bedded sheds, lighter animals (under 275kg), require 2.4-3.0 m<sup>2</sup>/animal; heavier cattle (over 275kg) need 4.0-5.0 m<sup>2</sup>/head.

### Next on the pre-housing checklist is overall herd health

Any dehorning and castrating of steers should be carried out well in advance of housing to allow animals time to recover. Timing is crucial, if done too early the risk of infection post procedure can be increased due to fly populations still being high. If done too close to housing, the risk of animals falling back or becoming too stressed can increase. It is important that animals being castrated or dehorned are vaccinated for a disease commonly known as "blackleg". This is caused by a Clostridial organism, and the fatality rate can be very high with this disease.

All animals' vaccinations should be brought up to date with the current farm vaccination program. Vaccines to consider should include salmonella for in-calf cows and heifers, and IBR vaccination for all breeding stock.

For calves born this year, vaccination against pneumonia should be carried out no later than 2 weeks pre-housing to allow sufficient time for immunization to occur. There is currently a new cow and calf health screening program being rolled out for suckler herds. It will determine the prevalence of IBR wild virus in sucklers and will give a good indication if the IBR vaccination should be used on a farm. There is a BMT test already present for dairy herds and it's a very useful tool to routinely check for the existence and prevalence of wild IBR virus on farm. Please contact your veterinary practice for more details.

Parasite control is also an important job to carry out before housing. Faecal egg counts (FEC) can be used to help determine the presence and quantify the burden of worms in specific groups of animals on farm. Testing animals in groups according to age is recommended to give a more accurate picture of the overall burden. For example, pooled/group samples should be submitted separately for calves, drystock and in-calf cows. Faecal egg counts are an important tool in the responsible use of anthelmintics. With the aid of this test, we can target our parasite control to encourage a susceptible population of worms on farms and ensure the longevity of the anthelmintic products available to us. Using FEC will also reduce cost in the long run if we can avoid the unnecessary dosing of certain groups of animals.

Farming systems will have an impact on the frequency of dosing especially in young stock. For example, dairy calves over the first grazing season will require more frequent dosing as they will have less immunity to a burden of worms in comparison to suckler calves of the same age. This is due to suckler calves receiving their mother's antibodies for longer in their first months of life.

You can also test for liver fluke, although it may not be necessary to treat liver fluke until later into the housing period. Fluke has a long lifecycle, taking 12 weeks to complete. Most flukicide products will kill mature/adult liver fluke and immature larvae from 6 weeks old meaning that if animals are treated at the time of testing, they may still develop mature liver fluke over the housing period and require a second dose. If animals are asymptomatic at the time of testing and up until the time they are housed, it is recommended these animals are treated 4-6 weeks after housing. This should ensure animals are free of liver fluke until they return to grass the following year.

The pre-housing period should be used to help reduce stress and increase animal welfare during the housing period. The aim is to prep each group of animals for a change in environment while reducing the risk of disease outbreak and a disruption to animal growth.





## Virtual fencing: A breakthrough technology for grassland farmers?

Conor Holohan  
IGA council member  
& AFBI, Northern  
Ireland



Virtual fencing has the potential to transform the way we manage grazing livestock. In just a few short years this technology has gone from concept to reality, with a small handful of companies worldwide now manufacturing virtual fencing systems. At the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) in Hillsborough, County Down an independent research programme has been underway since 2021 to examine the potential of this technology for livestock farmers and to assess potential impacts on animal behaviour and welfare.

### How does it work?

Virtual fencing uses a combination of GPS technology and sensory cues to keep livestock within an area without the need for physical fences. There are typically two main parts to the system, a virtual fence collar fitted on the animal's neck and a mobile app which is used to map out the desired GPS boundary (i.e. virtual fence). When the animal approaches the virtual fence an audio warning (beeping sound) alerts the animal to change its direction away from the fence. If the animal continues to pass beyond the virtual fence an electric pulse is delivered. The system is based on 'associative learning theory' whereby animals learn to respond to the audio cue to avoid the electric pulse. An initial training period of 7-14 days is required, using just a single virtual fence line.

### What are the benefits?

Virtual fencing could potentially offer a number of benefits such as:

- Reduced labour associated with maintaining and moving conventional fencing.
- Ability to introduce fencing in areas where physical fencing may not be feasible (e.g., mountainous terrain, short-term rented land, and silage fields which are only grazed for part of the year).
- Improved pasture utilisation and animal performance, for example through introduction of rotational grazing and more regular movements.
- Enhanced monitoring of individual animals within a herd/flock with GPS location available 24 hours per day.
- Flexibility with grazing management. Virtual fencing can be easily set up and altered at any time. This may be useful during wet weather, for example, as animals can be moved more regularly and excluded from areas at risk of waterlogging/poaching.
- Facilitation of conservation grazing and habitat management on hills and uplands. Livestock can be fenced within specific target areas and

moved to allow rest periods for vegetation to recover. They can also be excluded from landscape features such as streams, lakes, and bogs to protect water quality and help safeguard animals.

### What are the challenges?

As with many new technologies, virtual fencing is not without its challenges.

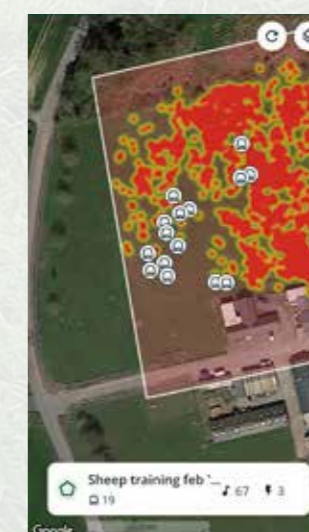
- **Animal welfare** – As a minimum requirement, livestock technologies such as virtual fencing must either maintain or improve animal welfare. An electric pulse fundamentally has the potential to cause pain and distress to an animal, and so the welfare implications of these systems has understandably been under much scrutiny.
- **Mobile network availability** – Current virtual fencing systems typically rely on mobile network coverage for flow of information between the mobile app and the collar. Technology developments are underway to overcome network availability issues, although at present, lack of coverage may be problematic in certain areas.
- **GPS accuracy** – One of the common challenges with GPS technologies is 'GPS drift'. With regards to virtual fencing, this is the difference between the actual location of the animal and the location recorded by the virtual fence collar. Factors affecting drift include proximity to buildings, heavy tree cover, steep slopes and hilly terrain (if the animal is in a valley the GPS receiver sees less of the sky and fewer satellites).
- **Battery life** – Virtual fence collars are typically fitted with a rechargeable battery unit and small solar panels to help maintain charge. Battery life largely depends on the grazing method and pasture size used. In larger grazing areas batteries can last 5+ months without being recharged, while this is reduced in smaller pastures (as animals come in contact with virtual fence more often).
- **Cost** – It is relatively early days in the development of this technology and there are few competitors in the market (only one manufacturer in Europe). The current pricing is reflective of that, with sheep collars coming in around €200 each and cattle collars around €300. Subscription fees are also required which can range from €25-50 per collar per year depending on how many collars you have.

### What has the research found?

Over the past three grazing seasons a number of virtual fencing studies have been carried out at AFBI Hillsborough, totalling some 400 animals, including suckler cows and calves, beef cattle, dairy cows, dairy heifers and ewes. The technology has effectively contained livestock within the virtual boundaries in these studies with very few escapes recorded after training. Animals have demonstrated an ability to rapidly adapt to the system, with many responding correctly to the audio cues within the first 1-2 days of training. Individual variation has been observed however and some animals in the herd/flock will take longer than others, thus a 7-14 day training period is essential. Welfare assessments in these studies have included detailed behavioural observations, activity tracking (lying time, standing time, step counts), and cortisol metabolite (stress hormone) analysis in faeces and hair. Results to date have shown comparable welfare between virtual and conventional electric fencing systems. GPS accuracy has been good overall, with some minor drift experienced on occasion (typically less than 5 metres). Nonetheless, virtual boundaries should not be located close to water points for this reason. Network coverage has generally not been an issue however signal is patchy in one low-lying field on the farm that is surrounded by steep hills and forestry. When virtual fence lines are moved in this field it takes longer for the collars to load the newly set boundary.

### Conclusion

The research programme has shown to date that virtual fencing can be an effective and welfare-friendly technology for managing grazing livestock. Although the number of farms using these systems is small at present, it could become commonplace in the years ahead, particularly as the technology is further improved and becomes more affordable.



## 2023 Presidential year - a look back

Alan Kelly  
Outgoing IGA president &  
UCD



It was a privilege and an honour to take on the role of President of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA). I am deeply humbled by the trust placed in me by my council colleagues and the opportunity to join the distinguished list of past incumbents. Over the association's 76-year history, this role has been held by a diverse and accomplished group representing various facets of Irish agriculture. Their contributions have paved the way for the IGA's enduring legacy, and I am humbled to continue this journey.

The IGA is a unique organization, representing a diverse spectrum of individuals, from farmers to industry professionals, state and advisory bodies, and academic institutions. This diversity fuels the association's dynamic, vibrant, and forward-thinking ethos. The IGA has always been committed to disseminating cutting-edge, practical, and technical advice that directly impacts the lives of our members

and the broader farming community. Our programs are shaped by the invaluable insights and ideas of our members, ensuring that the advice and information we provide meet their evolving needs.

### Reflections on the year and highlights

2023 was a truly landmark year for the IGA, particularly from an administrative and corporate perspective. It marked a significant turning point as we successfully established a new corporate structure and transitioned to a CLG operational model, aligning perfectly with the association's objectives and commercial offerings. The entire process was expertly overseen and executed by our dedicated presidential and administrative team, as well as past presidents. Their exceptional work, coupled with the invaluable advice from legal and corporate governance experts, collectively facilitated a seamless transition for the association, firmly placing the IGA on a new corporate footing. I extend my heartfelt thanks for their dedication and hard work.

Sponsorship support plays a pivotal role in the functioning of the IGA, enabling us to deliver the key social events in the agricultural calendar for our members. We are privileged to have four flagship sponsors for our events, namely YARA, AIB, FBD, and Mullinahone Co-Op. Their unwavering support, alongside that of our other agricultural corporate partners, many of whom have nurtured long-standing relationships with the IGA, is truly invaluable. Without their financial support, our annual dairy, beef, sheep, and student events would simply not be possible. As we look ahead to the future, the groundwork laid in 2023 has positioned the IGA for continued success.

In 2023, we eagerly resumed our full traditional events calendar following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our journey began in Charleville Park with our IGA Dairy Conference in January. The conference tackled pivotal

topics, including the changes in regulations related to the nitrate's directive and climate change targets and their direct financial implications for dairy farms. Our discussions also delved into 'Technologies to Future-Proof Dairy Farming' and the importance of 'Productive Swards in a Low Nitrogen Era.' These topics were particularly timely, addressing the regulatory obligations that farms must now navigate and adhere to. The event was an exceptional success, bolstered by the palpable positivity among farmers, thanks in part to a robust dairy market and a successful trading year.

Undoubtedly, one of the standout moments of the year was our Succession Planning event, which was open to all our members and held the evening before the main IGA dairy conference. This insightful evening provided our members with a valuable opportunity to delve into the crucial topic of securing successful farm succession. Aisling Meehan, with her extensive legal expertise in working with farming families, shared invaluable insights on how to develop effective agreements and succession plans. She also shed light on the common pitfalls that farmers and businesses must be cautious of when crafting their succession plans.

The summer months of May, June, and July brought a whirlwind of activity, with the IGA hosting a series of national events. It all began in May with our Sheep event, held at Eddie O'Connell's farm in Clonbullogue, Co. Offaly. In June, the spotlight turned to our Beef event, hosted by Chris McCarthy in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. The success of these events owed much to our host farms. In 2023, we were fortunate to partner with two nationally recognized family farms, both exemplary in their commitment to efficient, profitable, and sustainable pasture-based livestock production.

In July, our Dairy Summer Tour made a stop in the picturesque town of Kells, Co. Meath. This year, we broadened our horizons by extending the tour to span a full day and evening, during which we had the privilege of visiting three remarkable farms in the North-East region, namely those of Mark Cassidy, David Brady, and Eoin Brodie. Despite the challenging weather conditions, we had the opportunity to witness these dairy farms achieving commendable levels of performance within a notably demanding set of farming circumstances. At the heart of their success lay the unwavering determination of our host farmers to push the boundaries of what is attainable on their farms. This pursuit occurred against the backdrop of challenging soil types, high rainfall in the region, and

the complexities of dealing with land fragmentation. Throughout our visit, we learned about the remarkable journey these farms have undertaken, transforming into successful, profitable enterprises that stand as a testament to innovation, hard work, and a steadfast commitment to excellence.

In addition to our core objectives for the year, we had the added ambition to enhance social interaction and networking opportunities at IGA events. To achieve this, we introduced complementary burgers and beverages ahead of our Sheep and Beef Farm events. At our Dairy Summer Tour in Kells, the response was truly remarkable, with over 400 participants eagerly embracing the opportunity to enjoy a sit-down BBQ on the evening before the tour. These touches greatly enriched the social engagement and overall experience at all our events, providing the perfect backdrop for our members to share stories, engage in late-night bar conversations, and relish the camaraderie that has long been a hallmark of successful IGA events.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to each of the committee chairs, my colleagues within the broader IGA council, and our dedicated administrative officer, Maura Callery. Their unwavering dedication and collective effort were instrumental in delivering these exceptional events.

As we look ahead to the coming years, the IGA is fortunate to have a dynamic council with a diverse skill set that is exceptional when it comes to workability and volunteering. Enhanced engagement and improved communication with our members stand as the central focus and ethos of our association, and these are the key topics of discussion in all our council meetings. In this digital era, the IGA has embarked on an ambitious plan and communication strategy that will be implemented in the upcoming years. This strategy aims to boost our presence on all digital platforms, create engaging video content, redesign our website to offer a more interactive experience, and introduce facilities for our members to further enhance our communication channels. These efforts will expand our communication channels, complementing our traditional events and journal newsletters. So, keep an eye on our progress in the coming years and be sure to connect with us as we continue to evolve and expand our reach.

*Thanks for the year and generating  
many life-long memories!*





Cathal Moran (pictured 3rd from right) with his friends and council colleagues on his farm in March 2017 planning the Dairy Summer Tour he hosted the following July.

## Remembering Cathal Moran

Matt O’Keeffe and George Ramsbottom  
Former IGA council members



Cathal Moran combined so many of the attributes that are admirable in a farmer and family man. He was generous with his time and advice. Cathal was a strong advocate for farming and gave his time willingly in the service of his fellow farmers whether through his varied roles in Tirlán or his membership of the Irish Grassland Association. Cathal was also ambitious for his farm business and left behind the legacy of a well-developed and efficient dairy farm. He was forever exploring opportunities and novel approaches to milk production, from solar panels to improving farm roadway surfaces.

Above all, Cathal was a family man, married to Grainne, he took great pride in their children, Roisin, Sorcha and son Daire. As well as running a busy farm, Cathal most of all loved those family holidays when he could share his enthusiasm for travel and new experiences with Grainne and their family. As Cathal’s father Ned related recently, Cathal had a special attachment to his mother Anne, calling in daily for a cup of tea and a chat.

For those of us, and there are so many, who visited his farm, there was always a positive welcome, and an understated, informative explanation of his management and decision-making rationale. The IGA was privileged to be allowed to host its 2017 Dairy Summer Tour on

the Moran farm. The openness and generosity of Cathal shone through that day and impressed everyone present. Cathal enjoyed the camaraderie of his friends and acquaintances and never lacked for an informed and positive contribution to a debate or conversation, often delivering reflections on his own experiences on his farm at Skeaghvasteen, near Graiguenamanagh in County Kilkenny.

Mention of Kilkenny brings to mind Cathal’s huge love of hurling to which he contributed as a player, mentor and underage trainer with his beloved GAA club, the Blacks and Whites. The chaos of All-Ireland Sunday was missed by his family this year, remembering Cathal’s early start to get the jobs done and be on the road by 10am whenever Kilkenny were involved. Mention was made after his death of Cathal’s attitude to every player he coached, of limited or limitless ability: “There’s potential in everyone”. He was a coach for the local Cumann na mBunscol team until his illness reduced his energy and involvement, which ranged from fundraising to administration to parking the cars at matches. Cathal was passionate at whatever task he undertook, on the farm, in his local community, for the IGA or as a Tirlán Council member. Cathal is sadly missed by all his colleagues and friends in the Irish Grassland Association.

## Irish Grassland Association

### SEPA Direct Debit Mandate

Unique Mandate Reference

Unique Mandate Reference (UMR) – to be completed by Irish Grassland Association CLG

By signing this mandate form, you authorise (A) Irish Grassland Association CLG to send instructions to your bank to debit your account and (B) your bank to debit your account in accordance with the instructions from Irish Grassland Association CLG

As part of your rights, you are entitled to a refund from your bank under the terms and conditions of your agreement with your bank. A refund must be claimed within 8 weeks starting from the date on which your account was debited. Your rights are explained in a statement that you can obtain from your bank.

Please complete all the fields marked \*

Creditor's Name: I R I S H G R A S S I A N D A S S O C I A T I O N

Creditor's Identifier: I E 8 6 S D D 3 6 2 9 1 3

Creditor's Address: C O O K S T O W N K E L L S

City: C O M E A T H

Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: I R E L A N D

Type of payment\*  Recurrent payment  Or  One-off payment

Debtor Name\* \_\_\_\_\_

Debtor Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code \_\_\_\_\_

Country \_\_\_\_\_

Debtor account number – IBAN\* \_\_\_\_\_

Debtor bank identifier code – BIC \_\_\_\_\_

Signature & Date\*

Day / Month / Year

Address of Debtor †(Mandatory when collecting from a non EEA SEPA country or territory)  
Please return this mandate to the Creditor

## Irish Grassland Association CLG

### Membership Subscription Form

#### PERSONAL DETAILS

(BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Home number \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Are you involved in: Dairy  Beef  Sheep

Do you wish to receive occasional updates via Text?

Yes  No

By submitting this form to us you are subscribing to the Irish Grassland Association CLG as a member and we will send you occasional information publications through the post.

Irish Grassland Association CLG, Kells, Co. Meath.

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# Irish Grassland Association CLG

As you are aware, the Irish Grassland Association is now a Company Limited by Guarantee. We will continue to offer the very same services to you our loyal members, but as a new legal entity i.e. a CLG, and not a registered charity. Our membership fee will remain at €60 in 2024. Value to our members is crucial to us, and this fee has not increased in over ten years.

Soon we will not be able to contact you, or keep you informed of any activities in the Irish Grassland Association, without your clear and express consent to join the Irish Grassland Association CLG. So please re-submit your signed membership application to us, if you have not done so already.