



ICSA President Gabriel Gilmartin, ICSA General Secretary Eddie Punch, and Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney TD, at a meeting of the ICSA National Executive in Dublin recently.

National Farm Survey reflects better prices in 2011

By Eddie Punch

The headline figure from the preliminary National Farm Survey figures for 2011 suggests that farm income is up 32% on average in 2011, compared with 2010. Good news is always welcome but does this tell the full story?

Analysis of farm incomes based on an overall average tends to be meaningless given the wide disparity between farms in terms of size, enterprise and land types, not to mention

efficiency and output levels. Nonetheless, important trends are evident.

There is, of course, no denying that 2011 was a special year for farming. Cattle prices rose by unprecedented levels and the ICSA prediction, made at the end of 2010, that beef price would reach €4/kg proved to be accurate, even allowing that we didn't go higher. At least the ICSA analysis was the only show in town when it came to telling farmers to expect that scarcity at home and increased global demand would lead to better prices.

Sheep price was also very strong in 2011 and dairying had an excellent year on the back of very good milk price, with the added bonus of a doubling of price for male calves and exceptional cull cow prices, even for Holstein cows, some of which made €1200 or €1300.

Dairy farmers are less optimistic about 2012, especially after milk price cuts of 3-4c/l in April, along with superlevy fines for some. Butter price is down almost a third compared with 2011 so it's most unlikely that their incomes will hold at 2011 levels.

Nonetheless, the 2011 figures make stark reading when comparing dairying with other enterprises (see table 1). On a farm of 50-100 ha, the dairy farm income is estimated at €92,000 which is 3-3.5 times the income obtained on beef, sheep or suckler farms. Across all farm sizes, dairy farms averaged almost €70,000 compared with €10,600 on cattle rearing farms (sucklers). On a more positive note, large scale beef farms (over 100 ha) returned an income of over €57,000, but this still compares unfavourably with large scale tillage farms

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doing over €112,000 and large scale dairy farms doing over €117,000.

However, for the more typical and representative farmer on cattle and sheep farms, the income picture is improved but still weak. 30-50 ha suckler farms showed an income of less than €15,000, whereas the beef, sheep and tillage equivalents were over €20,000, €19,000 and €17,000.

Nonetheless, it is the case that the income figures for all enterprises are significantly better than the average year and it is clear that the introduction of full decoupling has been of huge benefit to farmers. The increase in cattle and sheep prices is partially linked to higher global demand but it is the scarcity of supplies that has been the key factor in turning good market conditions into better prices.

Without decoupling, the likelihood is that cattle numbers going through meat plants would be significantly higher than the 24-25,000 per week range that we have experienced recently.

Sadly, we also had to see ewe numbers drop from 4.5 million to 2.5 million to make the difference in sheep price. As

sheep numbers have started to drift upwards in 2012, the hope is that this won't have too much impact on price but recent weeks do not give rise to optimism, with current prices back 16% compared with this time last year.

One obvious issue, which emerges, is whether disadvantaged area payments should be more targeted at low-income cattle and sheep farmers, and perhaps small-scale dairy and tillage farmers. It seems incongruous to be giving the same rate of disadvantaged area payment to a large-scale dairy farm as you would to a 40 ha suckler or sheep farmer when you examine the income disparity.

It is only fair to point out that several dairy farmers have suggested to me that the NFS figures strongly over-estimate dairying income. They argue that costs of energy, fertiliser and silage making have all rocketed and this is most acutely felt on intensively stocked dairy farms. They also point to the substantial investment that dairy farmers have made in recent years in upgrading facilities with the not unreasonable observation that these required borrowings which now have to be repaid.

Table 1: Family Farm Income by System and Farm Size – 2011

Size (Ha)	<10	10-20	20-30	30-50	50-100	>100	All
Dairy	-	-	27439	55426	92081	117624	69617
Cattle Rearing	-	5438	5521	14735	26165	-	10600
Cattle Other	-	4906	11907	20363	30462	57355	14967
Sheep	-	7256	12556	19402	30048	-	17084
Mixed Livestock	-	-	-	30111	66594	111385	34750
Tillage	-	-	-	17443	45138	112591	35737
All	2697	5447	11155	25726	54970	9412	24861

President's Address

Gabriel Gilmartin - President, ICSA



It's hard to know what summer

2012 has in store for Irish farmers. While

there is certainly cause for optimism and there is plenty to be positive about in farming today, it's also fair to say that there is considerable uncertainty ahead.

Since the last edition of Drystock Farmer, sheep prices have fallen sharply. Sheep numbers have risen 12% since last year, with negative consequences for farmers at the factories. This shows the impact of the measures contained in Food Harvest 2020, which aim to increase the production of sheep. However, with a relatively modest increase in numbers, the prices have fallen substantially. We have to consider whether this type of expansion is feasible in Irish sheep farming.

On a positive note, beef prices are still strong and the feeling is that this will be the case throughout the summer at least. According to Bord Bia, supplies will remain tight in Ireland and across Europe throughout 2012, supporting continued strong prices. We cannot become complacent though – the challenge in this situation is how to maintain the positive trade. Efforts to open up new markets are more vital than ever, and I welcome the news that a technical delegation from China is to visit Ireland in the coming weeks with a view to opening up trade lines between the two countries.

The ongoing CAP negotiations continue to dominate the horizon, although progress is slow. The ICSA presented our view of what needs to happen in the best interests of Irish farming post-2013 to an Oireachtas Joint

Committee on Agriculture, which is detailed further on in this issue. The main issue is the fact that the EU budget has yet to be finalised. It is somewhat heartening to see some flexibility entering the debate on the thorny topic of greening, but there's a long way to go in the discussions. What we need now is for our elected representatives to get behind us and fight for what's best for the agriculture sector in Ireland.

The recently published National Farm Survey figures prove yet again that that decoupled payments are the best system of support. The Teagasc research show that last year, there was an overall increase in farm income of 32% on the 2010 figures. This would have been much less likely under a system of coupled payments and one only has to compare beef price today with beef price ten years ago to see the difference.

Nonetheless, the figures prove that beef and sheep income is still not high enough and processors and retailers need to recognise that it is imperative that current prices are sustained into the long term, while we need to see costs coming down. It's good to see debt levels coming down by 20% - but the figure is still high at €1.8 billion and farmers need a continuation of low interest rates and strong product prices in order to further erode debt levels.

The ICSA is gearing up for a busy summer. We will be taking part in prominent farming events throughout the summer, including Sheep 2012 in Athenry, as well as hosting our own on-farm events and seminars. Meanwhile we will continue the drive to make sure farming remains at the top of the national and political agendas and strive to ensure that Irish agriculture remains the leading light in these challenging times.

News Briefs Compiled by Kathy McKenna

ICSA CALLS FOR CHANGE IN FAIR DEAL SCHEME

The Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association says the review of the Fair Deal Nursing Care Scheme – announced recently by Minister of State for Older People, Kathleen Lynch - must recommend a move away from the current system, which depends on the value of property to recoup its costs.

Under the Scheme, the cost of Nursing home care for those who cannot afford to pay will be recouped from their assets including their house, after their death, to a maximum amount of 5% of their assets, per year of Nursing Home Care. In the case of a householder this reimbursement has been capped at 15%

However this cap only extends to farms and farmland in very limited circumstances, meaning that if a farmer is in a nursing home for 10 years, the

Government potentially could take 50% of the value of the land.

General Secretary of the ICSA, Eddie Punch, says: "The Minister is right to question the logic behind a property-based system for nursing home care. The potential bill for a farm family is frightening, and in some cases will put the successor out of business. This could easily arise where the elderly parent ends up requiring perhaps 10 years of care following a stroke or the onset of dementia, for example.

ICSA REACTS ANGRILY TO SFA CALLS FOR RATES FOR FARMS

ICSA President Gabriel Gilmartin has reacted angrily to calls for commercial rates to be charged to farmers and other rural businesses. Small Firms' Association Director, Patricia Callan, recently suggested that the current rates system needs a complete revamp – and to include farms among the businesses liable to pay rates.

"Farms cannot be compared with shops or other urban based businesses that benefit from the whole urban infrastructure that includes parking, footpaths, street lighting and other amenities that attract customers and drive footfall.

"By contrast, farmers, by and large, derive little or no benefit from the activities of county councils. Local authorities provide no facilities or amenities which assist farmers in selling their produce. Instead, they end up supplying processors who in turn deliver key farm products such as meat and dairy to retail outlets such as supermarkets. In the last 12 months, we have got a very good insight into how much margin supermarkets have been making on these products.

"It is therefore clear that the focus of rates should be on those who benefit the most from the facilities provided by local authorities and this does not include farmers," he concluded.

ICSA ADDRESS EBLEX NORTHERN CONFERENCE

ICSA General Secretary Eddie Punch was in Wetherby recently, addressing the first EBLEX Northern Regional Conference. The focus of the conference was market opportunities for beef and lamb, encompassing the dynamics of trade between England and Ireland.

Mr. Punch's presentation, "An Irish perspective on the dynamics between the UK and Ireland for beef and sheep", took a comprehensive look at the trading relationship between the two countries and compared the throughput numbers and prices achieved in both over the past number of years.

The ICSA was the only Irish organisation to address the conference.



Before you start using machinery on the farm, always check for the presence of overhead power lines where you're working. Ensure that everyone observes safe working practices wherever overhead power lines cross the farmland and when near electric fencing. Coming into contact, or near contact, with overhead power lines can be fatal. Extra care should be taken when using tractors with front loaders, slurry spreaders, trailers with high loads and harvesters. In the case of an emergency, call **1850 372 999**.

ICSA holds Suckler Farm Open Day



Visitors attending the Suckler Farm Open Day on the farm of Joe Flynn, Dunhill, Co. Waterford

A farm walk was held recently on the suckler farm of ICSA member, Joe Flynn. The event was extremely successful with a turnout of between 50 and 60 people on the day, with some members travelling from as far afield as Mayo. The good weather on the day boosted the crowds and made the whole event very enjoyable.

Joe and his family farm 120 cows on their 63 hectare farm at Dunhill in Co. Waterford, producing top-quality Charolais cross calves.

After the farm walk, which was conducted by Mr. Flynn, Ciaran Conway from Devenish Nutrition delivered a talk on the latest developments in nutrition, while Brendan Keane from Waterford Agri Services and Joe O'Mahony from Independent

Seeds talked about best practice in re-seeding. Teagasc advisor Paddy O'Brien was on hand to talk about the farm system. Connolly's Red Mills sponsored the event, and Waterford Agri Services also sponsored an exceptionally generous free draw on the day of 10 acres worth of grass seed.

ICSA Suckler Committee Chairman Dermot Kelleher said, "the day was a great success. It

was very informative for myself and many people on the day told me they had learned far more than they had expected. We had a number of people travelling good distances to take part in the Open Day and they all said it was well worth the journey."

The Suckler Committee is hoping to continue to organise events like this one. Dermot Kelleher said, "going to a particular farm, looking at the animals and the



Mr. Joe Flynn addressing the crowd at the Open Day on his farm



Visitors taking part in the farm walk at the Open Day

system and having a discussion about it is far more beneficial in terms of learning than reading about it or being told about it in a meeting room.”

“Getting experts in such as those from Teagasc and Waterford Agri Services adds to the day and it was a very positive experience.”

“Joe Flynn has a super set-

up here in Dunhill, excellent management systems for grassland etc, and a very simple, straightforward way of farming, which yields top-quality results and very impressive calves. I would like to see more farms like this and we’re hoping to have another ICSA Suckler Farm Open Day later in the summer.”

ICSA Munster Vice-President,

John Halley, echoed those sentiments: “Joe Flynn’s farm is like a model farm. It’s a practical, well laid out set-up that you’d love to take home. And most importantly, he produces very good cattle.”

He also says events like this are great for the ICSA as an organisation. “The thing that struck me about the Open Day is that we had a good number

of non-members in attendance, which is very positive for the ICSA. And for the members themselves, this is a much more attractive occasion than a plain meeting. People are still talking about it a number of weeks later so I would hope that we can keep the momentum going and expand this initiative across more counties and across the different breeds that are farmed in Ireland.”



Mr. Ciaran Conway, Devenish Nutrition, speaking at the Open Day



Visitors at the Open Day examining housed stock on Joe Flynn's farm



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German Beef Finishers Visit Ireland

By Kornelia Salber

At ICSA, we are doing our bit to find new export markets for weanlings. ICSA Development Officer Kornelia Salber got into contact with beef finishers from her native Germany and the first big finisher came over on a 2 day information trip in early May.

Ralf Mager and his son Robin from Kerpen near Cologne are finishing 3,500-4,000 cattle, mainly bulls. Currently they are sourcing all their U & E grade bulls in France and to a lesser extent in Belgium. According to Ralf it is difficult to source good cattle anywhere in Europe at the moment, and he expects a higher demand in the German market because Turkey has returned to the market. He is looking to buy bulls with smaller weights or lean heifers from 450 kg upwards.

The Magers mainly sell to 54 REWE supermarkets, who sell beef from their region. They were getting €4.10/kg for bulls up to 450 kg until recently, but REWE now wants bulls with a maximum carcass weight of 400 kg. Ralf says he is only willing to sell at that weight if he'll get €4.40/kg. Bulls weighing 500 kg or more are sold to France and The Netherlands. He couldn't sell cattle with a fat score



German beef finishers Ralf and Robin Mager with ICSA Development Officer Kornelia Salber

3 or higher, as the desired fat score in Germany is around 2.

At the moment he has sheds for 600 cattle at his farm, with plans for expansion. The Magers' farm is in one of the best farming areas in Germany, with a good soil type and they have all their land in tillage. Current feed for their cattle includes maize silage, brewers' grain, soya, wheat and barley, sugar beet pulp, straw and also seaweed and flaxseed to achieve higher omega 3 & 6 levels in the meat.

On their first day here in Ireland we met with John Humphreys, General Manager of Livestock Services for Cork Mart, who explained all the transport regulations and also the cost involved

in getting cattle out of Ireland. We then visited Joe O'Flynn's farm in Dunhill, Co. Waterford to have a look at his Charolais herd and his weanlings, and then moved on to Jimmy Power's farm nearby, where we saw his suckler herd. He crosses with Limousin and Charolais and some of his bulls are near finishing.

On the second day we met with Richard Kirwan and Jim Bush from New Ross mart who took us out to see Declan Ryan's farm near Waterford. Declan crosses his suckler cows with Parthenaise for his replacement heifers, and puts them to a Belgium Blue bull. Liam Powers in Co. Waterford showed us his suckler cows with calves at foot and the heifers he is going to finish. He uses Charolais

and Limousin AI for his cattle. John Whelan finishes 700-800 cattle every year and showed us the stock he bought as well as explaining his ration to us. The last farm we visited was Sidney and Fred Sunderland's farm in Gorey, Co. Wexford. They have 120 suckler cows who are crossed with a Belgium Blue bull. He finishes all his cattle himself, and they are very impressive.

Ralf and Robin say they are taking many positive impressions of Ireland back to Germany. They saw mixed stock at Kilkenny mart, that's the same as in every other county. He was impressed with some of the top quality stock, especially the Belgium Blue crosses. They were delighted with the friendly reception and

appreciated the time every farmer took to show them around and answer their questions.

A question mark for him is the difference in the suckler cow. In France he sees suckler cows of 700-800 kg, little milk and the calves are used to eating bigger amounts of meal and have probably a completely different rumen development. He was surprised when he saw the mostly small suckler cows here, but is impressed by the Belgium Blue crosses, as some of the calves here are very long, whereas a lot of the BB stock on the continent are often short. At the moment prices are too high because of the added transport and ferry costs but he is definitely interested in doing business with Irish farmers in the future.

COMMENT ICSA Munster Vice President John Halley: "It is an eye opener, he is selling U & E grade cattle for €4.10 for 450 kg, these type of cattle are making €4.25 at the moment here in Ireland. It shows how dependent we are on Britain for trade."

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ICSA tells Joint Oireachtas Committee: Time for Progress on CAP Budget



Andrew Doyle TD



Michael Moynihan TD



Michael Colreavy TD

A delegation from the ICSA travelled to Leinster House recently to outline our position on the ongoing CAP reform negotiations. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture is in the process of gathering views on the reforms which it will pass on to the European Parliament.

ICSA President Gabriel Gilmartin led the delegation, along with General Secretary, Eddie Punch, CAP Committee Chair, Billy Gray and CAP Committee Vice-Chair, Edmond Phelan on the 8th of May. The ICSA delegation was welcomed by Andrew Doyle, Fine Gael TD for Wicklow who is the chairman of the Committee.

Gabriel Gilmartin began proceedings by outlining the key points of concern to the assembled Committee members:

- concern that the EU budget will be sufficient to retain the current level of CAP across Europe;
- that Ireland gets at least a similar amount to what we get at present;
- that the flat rate payment will not work in Ireland and that any significant flattening of payments across the board will hit too many farmers too severely;
- that we don't end up with a whole new regime of extra bureaucracy and restrictions, particularly in relation to greening;
- what is happening to the land rental market as a result of the uncertainty around reference years.

The presentation was very well received by the Committee – with a huge degree of agreement with the ICSA's main points. Fianna Fail's Michael Moynihan TD said that for him, the crucial issue is the lack of clarity on the overall EU Budget. This needs to be decided upon before too long, according to him. Deputy Pat Deering of Fine Gael was of the opinion that we are all speaking "in a vacuum" until the overall Budget is decided upon, while Deputy Martin Heydon (Fine Gael) described this as the 'critical issue'.

Sinn Fein Deputy Michael Colreavy said he found very little to disagree with in the ICSA's presentation – picking up in particular on the issue of coupled payments, agreeing that there can be no justification for going back to such a system. However, he added, in principle, he disagrees with the ICSA's stated position of 'evolution, not revolution' with regards to CAP reform. On this point, Deputy Colreavy says he would like to see a rather more radical approach – with the reforms moved in the direction of a link-up with food production targets.

There were also contributions from Fine Gael Deputy John O'Mahony and Senator Pat O'Neill, who focused on how re-distribution of payments might look in practice and how CAP reform would impact on Food Harvest 2020 targets.

As part of the ICSA's presentation to the Committee, it was suggested a reform of the current system of land use and tenants rights is necessary, to give more protection to farmers who are renting ground. This received unanimous support at the meeting. It was recognised that the havoc being created in the rental market currently is directly linked to the uncertainty over the reference years in the CAP negotiations – and that this is possibly a problem only in Ireland, given our almost unique tradition of land ownership and land use.

Speaking in response to the Committee members' comments, ICSA General Secretary Eddie Punch said that this particular issue is one that can be solved by ourselves in Ireland rather than looking to Europe – and this is where the Oireachtas members can play an important role.

Essentially, what's needed is new legislation to improve the incentives for longer term leasing, improve tenants' rights and get rid of the annual threat of losing a lease on valuable rented land, with very short notice.

The ICSA's contribution to the Committee will be included in a CAP policy document, which will be sent to Brussels to form part of the ongoing CAP post-2013 negotiations.



Pat Deering TD



Martin Heydon TD



Senator Pat O'Neill,



John O'Mahoney TD



I'm the lucky one.

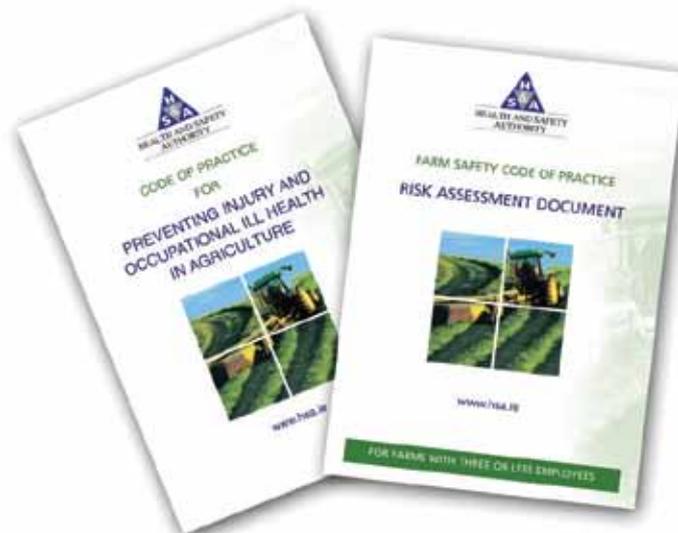
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ICSA members frustrated over new TB testing rules

Changes in the TB testing rules are developing into a significant cause for concern and frustration among ICSA members.

The issue was discussed at the recent meeting of the ICSA National Executive, which was attended by Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney. The changes, which came into effect on the 1st of January this year, mean that when two or more TB reactors are discovered on a farm, herds adjoining that holding are restricted, pending a clear test, if they have not been tested clear in the previous four months. Cattle can only be moved on or off the farm if they are being sent for slaughter, until the herd clears a test.

There is huge resentment among ICSA members to these measures, which amount to a considerable



John Barron

restriction on trade. With prices currently strong, the risk of being locked up because of reactors in your neighbour's herd – and the resulting effect on profits – is a huge worry.

ICSA Rural Development Chairman John Barron said: "While we fully appreciate and support the Minister's goal to eradicate TB in Ireland, we feel these restrictions are too much of a burden on farmers. It's particularly worrying for suckler farmers who need to get their weanlings to the mart to sell them. A

contiguous breakdown is potentially disastrous for suckler farms."

The Minister has recently issued a statement clarifying the Government's position on the new contiguous testing arrangements. He reiterated that statement at the National Executive meeting, emphasising that restrictions will be examined on a case-by-case basis, and only herds which are identified as being "genuinely relevant to the breakdown" will be restricted.



Mr. Barron said: "This is to be welcomed – however the fact remains that a TB breakdown in one herd has the very real potential to lock up several other herds, and possibly several parishes. The average Irish herdowner operates across three separate blocks of land, and many farms are fragmented even further. One farmer could have a dozen or more neighbours and in those situations, the possibility of being restricted is quite high."

"We also have to think about farms which may be

adjacent to an industrial feedlot, which often have almost permanent TB reactor issues. Are these farmers supposed to cope with an endless cycle of restriction and re-testing?"

"With advances in technology, the Department is now able to cut off all avenues of sale at the click of a mouse. What we are looking for is a guarantee that there will be flexibility in these measures, and only high-risk herds are restricted. Not being able to sell your cattle as normal can lead to severe hardship and this has to be avoided."



"One farmer could have a dozen or more neighbours and in those situations, the possibility of being restricted is quite high."

– John Barron, ICSA Rural Development Chairman



Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney TD, discussing the new TB testing rules with members of the ICSA National Executive at a meeting in Dublin recently



Where to for beef?

As always, the major topic of conversation among beef farmers over the past few weeks has been the price beef is making. Fortunately, the word most often used to describe those prices recently has been 'strong'. But this situation creates as many questions - and possibly even more speculation - than the opposite scenario.

At the time of writing, steers are making between €4.10 & €4.15/kg, with heifers up to 15 cent dearer. Bulls are making up to €4.20 while cows are being sold for up to €4. The big question is - can and will these prices last?

There is a feeling of cautious optimism for beef farmers. At the recent ICSA beef committee meeting, the sentiment was that the medium term outlook is



Edmond Phelan

positive, barring a crisis. Bord Bia is predicting that tight supplies across Ireland and the rest of Europe throughout 2012 will support a continued strong price for beef exports.

ICSA Beef Chairman, Edmond Phelan says: "Beef prices are where they need to be for the producers at the moment. Scarcity of stock seems to be the driving factor behind the strong prices and this looks set to continue for the next five or six months anyway. The prices are also reflecting the changes in



consumer preferences - there is very strong demand for low-end cuts from the manufacturing trade keeping cow prices elevated and I'd be confident this will remain the case for some time."

"The export trade is also looking up. We know that Minister Coveney is working on opening up the Chinese market, which would be huge boost for Irish beef.

However, this may be a long-term project and at best, may provide an outlet in the shorter term for 5th quarter edibles. The ICSA has also brought German buyers over to Ireland with a view to expanding that market, and we've had the recent re-opening of the Libyan market for Irish and EU beef. These new markets are necessary for the Irish beef trade to continue to thrive. We can also expect a bump in demand during the major sporting events taking place in London and Eastern Europe this summer", says Mr. Phelan.

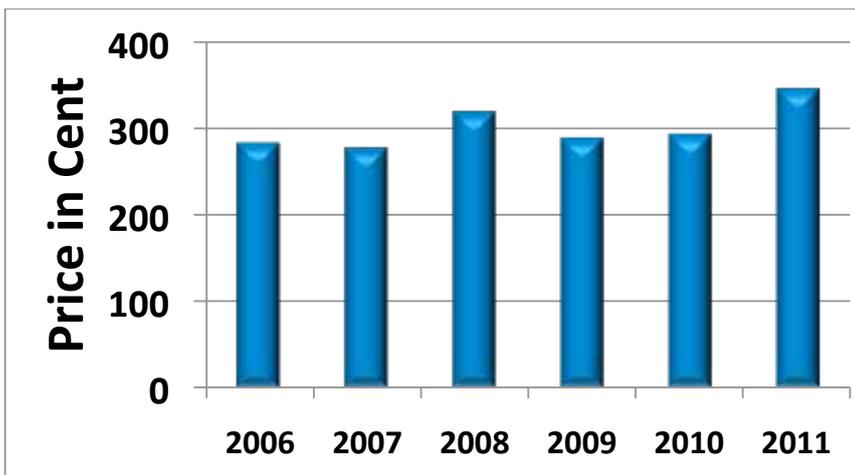
However, increased prices are not necessarily indicative of increased profit margins. "The high cost of buying in store cattle this spring has impacted on beef finishers, but at the moment they have fallen back a bit and are more in line with beef prices. But despite the high prices, cattle have to be replaced

because if you reduce your livestock level, it can be difficult to build it back up in years to come."

High overheads are also an issue: "Input prices are going through the roof. Diesel prices are impacting us directly and also pushing up contractor charges. Fertilizer prices are horrendous - it costs nearly €100 to fertilize an acre of silage. This shows the poor judgement of government in allowing manufacturing to decline and placing too much emphasis on the service industry and financial services. Beef prices are where they need to be to allow farmers to cope with these costs, and the fact that retailers have been able to absorb the higher prices and the price of beef in the supermarket has not increased gives you an idea of the huge profit margins that the retailers have enjoyed for years."

Irish Cattle Prices 2006 - 2011

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ICSA Sheep Conference 2012

“Sheep – Can We Keep The Momentum Going?” was the title of the conference held by the ICSA in February this year. The prospects for the sheep trade was the focus of the seminar, held at the Lord Bagenal Hotel in Leighlinbridge, Co Carlow, on February 13th.

ICSA Sheep Committee Chairman, Paul Brady, chaired the event and Fine Gael TD Andrew Doyle gave the opening address.

Bord Bia Sheep Specialist, Declan Fennell outlined the outlook for sheep farming for 2012. He explained that production is set to increase by 2% in 2012, while there has been a growth of 3.5 % in the Irish sheep flock. The growth markets of Germany, Sweden and Belgium were discussed as having significant potential for Irish lamb producers.

Mr Fennell took a look at the dramatic downward trend in New Zealand lamb production and exports, which has led to a significant increase in NZ lamb prices destined for the EU. He also pointed out that the availability and price of NZ lamb will play an important role in determining prices within the EU.

New Zealand did not fill its EU import quota in 2011 and doesn't look like doing so in 2012. Apart from a reduction in production due to weather and conversion to dairying, the Kiwis are increasingly focused on non-EU markets such as South East Asia.

The discussion also turned to the Irish consumer's attitude towards lamb. Bord Bia research shows that younger consumers are not engaging enough with lamb, while older consumers love lamb but are cutting back in order to save money. The Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme continues to be a priority of Bord Bia,

according to Mr. Fennell. He concluded by explaining that the main challenge now is to manage the “delicate balance” between lamb prices and consumers' disposable spend.

Bob Cahill, Kepak Site Manager, gave the attendees the processor's view of the prospects for lamb. He commented that there **is** a market for ram lambs, which led to a comprehensive debate. Members at the meeting accepted that there may be a niche market for this type of meat but argued that the Irish consumer does not want to buy it.

It was argued that there should be a re-think of the classification system at processing plants, so that ram lambs are channelled into their own specific market and kept out of the Irish retail market. Ram lambs are acceptable to certain ethnic markets and the conference heard of the importance of Muslim festivals such as Ramadan.

Phil Stocker, Chief Executive of the UK National Sheep Association was on hand to give the views from across the Irish Sea on sheep farming development. He began by outlining the changes that have taken place in UK sheep farming over the past few years.

The UK flock has been in steady decline since the early 2000s; however the fall-off in numbers has evened out over the last four years. UK sheep meat consumption has reduced quite significantly in the past five to six years also, down almost 100,000 tonnes on the 2007 figure to 299,000 tonnes in 2011.

Mr Stocker concluded by outlining the key issues for UK sheep farming. He said identification and traceability are prominent issues, as are exotic and endemic diseases such as Schmallenberg



ICSA National Sheep Conference 2012 Speakers

diseases, scab, endo parasites and lameness. Controlling farm costs tightly and improving efficiency are also vital. He said there is a need for investment in the domestic market and that policy makers need to provide clarity on the “balance between production and the environment.”

The Associated Craft Butchers of Ireland were represented by Laurence Murphy, who told us that lamb sales have dropped significantly in butcher shops. The traditional ratio of sales was 5 lambs for every beef animal – the ratio now is two lambs to every beef animal. In his experience, the public perception is that lamb is a fatty meat, and today's consumers prefer lean meats.

Mr. Murphy said not having lambs too heavy is a key issue. He also says there are a number of ways the drop-off in sales is being tackled – through education, promotional initiatives, distributing attractive recipes and getting chefs involved in promoting lamb consumption.

Tullow Livestock Mart Assistant Manager, Eric Driver, emphasised the point that the mart is still playing a very useful part in the sales of



Paul Brady, ICSA Sheep Committee Chairman

sheep in Ireland and that they need to be supported for that to continue. He gave a provocative viewpoint on the thorny issue of electronic tagging. There was also a debate on the EIF levies, and whether they should be stopped at marts.

Catherine O'Leary, Veterinary Advisor with MSD Animal Health had a very interesting presentation on sheep health, with a particular focus on lameness. One of Catherine's most interesting and provoking insights was the latest findings suggesting that routine paring of sheep hooves was doing more damage than good. She stressed that paring still has a critical role but the focus



Andrew Doyle TD



Catherine O'Leary, MSD Ireland



Laurence Murphy,
Association Craft Butchers



Bob Cahill, Kepak

should be restricted to sheep with lameness issues.

ICSA President Gabriel Gilmartin also represented the organisation with a talk on the sheep trade and he highlighted the role of

scarcity for delivering higher prices. "We have seen a return to sheep farming since the collapse of the building sector and this has been a major positive. The fall in the national flock seems to have bottomed out and hopefully it can

now stabilise and maybe attract in some much-needed young farmers. However, we have to be careful that any increase in production is in response to increased demand on UK and European markets."

ICSA wishes to acknowledge the support and help of Kepak, MSD Animal Health Ireland, Nutribio/CAHL, BFL Nutrition, Volac Ireland O'Donovan Engineering and Tullow Livestock Mart in the successful running of the conference.

Man's Best Friend Needs Regulation

Following the introduction of proposals by Leinster Vice President, Paddy Kent and Sheep Committee Chairman, Paul Brady, the ICSA is calling for a change in legislation, so that all puppies and dogs cannot be sold unless they have been microchipped. The ICSA also wants to see a central database set up to handle the details of the dog's owners. The proposal got unanimous support at a recent meeting of the National Executive.

All dogs in Northern Ireland must be microchipped according to legislation that came into force last April, under the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. According to the Department, the new law "will put the North of Ireland at the forefront of dog control in these islands."

ICSA Sheep chairman, Paul Brady said: "When the proposals

first came to my attention, my initial thought was of marauding dogs attacking sheep. However, the threat from dogs is much deeper and sinister than just sheep worrying, as distressing as that is for sheep farmers. Mandatory microchipping helps local councils and wardens to deal with dangerous, out of control and possibly diseased dogs which pose a danger to everyone. We often hear stories about dogs attacking children adults and even members of the Gardai in urban areas."

"In the last few months alone several children have been attacked by the likes of Husky dogs in Limerick, Clare, Donegal and elsewhere. We need a stronger regime of control which promotes more responsible dog ownership for everyone's benefit."

Micro chipping is also useful for the control of disease. These include rabies, Toxocarasis and Neospora. Alarmingly, one case of rabies has already been confirmed

in the UK since the start of the year, with another case awaiting confirmation. Toxocarasis can cause a range of nasty symptoms in humans including blindness and epilepsy. Neospora, which is highly transmissible, causes abortion and early embryo loss in cattle and can be transmitted by unvaccinated dogs.

A microchip is a small electronic device the size of a grain of rice, which is implanted under the skin normally at the scruff of the neck. Each one contains a unique 15 digit number which can be read by a scanner. Ownership or change of ownership details would be recorded on a central database monitored by a state authority.

Mr. Brady continued: "From my perspective as a commodity chairman in ICSA, I am cognisant that our livestock must be identifiable and traceable through any change of owner. It is unacceptable in my view that dogs - which in more ways than one can



be highly dangerous animals - are not subject to the same controls. 10,000 dogs were put down in this country last year. This number would significantly reduce if the onus was on all sellers of dogs to register their microchipped pups as well as the change of ownership. We in ICSA are under no illusion that this initiative will not meet with universal public approval. However we are confident that those who truly value their pets and working dogs will view this ICSA campaign as a progressive initiative rather than as an imposition. Farmers, particularly drystock farmers appreciate more than most the usefulness and the companionship benefits of man's best friend."

ICSA at Sheep 2012

Come visit our stand at the Teagasc Sheep 2012 event, taking place at Teagasc, Mellows Campus, Athenry, Co. Galway on Saturday 30th June 2012 at 10am. Drop by the ICSA stand on the day to chat to ICSA members and staff. See www.teagasc.ie for more information on the event.

Farming families “the easy target” for 3rd level cuts

President of the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers’ Association, Gabriel Gilmartin, has reacted angrily to proposed changes to the student grant means test.

Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn has announced that he expects a report in the summer, which will contain proposals for the inclusion of capital assets as well as income when calculating eligibility for the student grant.

Mr. Gilmartin says, “the ICOSA is totally and utterly opposed to this. If these changes are brought in, it would effectively discriminate against hard-working farming families wishing to send their children to third level education.”

“The National Farm Survey estimates for 2011, demonstrate that the average farm income reached an unprecedented high; however it is still relatively low compared with other sectors at €24,861. However, there are

significant variations in farm income. In 2011, which was an exceptionally good year for farm income, only 15% of farmers exceeded €50,000, whereas 21% of farmers earned less than €5,000.”

“Even more significant is the fact that cattle and sheep farmers, who make up the bulk of farmers in Ireland, had an income of less than €31,000 on farms up to 250 acres in size. Therefore, assets which appear to be substantial do not support

significant income for the majority of farmers. They are simply the tools of the trade.”

“A suckler farmer on a farm of 75-125 acres had, on average, income of €14,000 in 2011. Minister Quinn is proposing to eliminate third level education for these cattle and sheep farming families if this is allowed to go through.”

“What Minister Quinn is doing is simply choosing the easy target. Farming is doing well at the moment but as we all know, this can change very quickly. This ludicrous proposal clearly shows he is not in touch with the reality of the finances of most farming families in Ireland, where essential capital assets such as farm buildings and machinery do not equal money in the bank, and profit margins are tight.”

“The Minister has said that the best option for young people in the current economy is to remain in college for as long as possible – these measures fly in the face of that advice.”

“I call on all members of the Government parties to make clear where they stand on this issue and whether they are happy to prevent many farm families from aspiring to third level education for their children.”



Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn TD

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ICSA Tour to France, September 30th to October 5th

FEATURING:

- Visit to biggest and most prestigious French Cattle breeding show (Sommet de l'Elevege) featuring the very best of Charolais, Limousin, Salers, Parthenaise, Aubrac cattle etc)
- Visits to the National Charolais and National Limousin breeding centres at Marsault and Pole de Lanaud
- See the dominant market which determines French sheep price at Rungis
- Visit to Formula 1 racing track at Magny Cours
- Visits to top class Charolais and Limousin farms

PRICE: €889

(to be confirmed, depending on numbers)

Single supplement will be extra

Non refundable booking deposit (€250) required before June 22, 2012

INTERESTED?

Contact ICSA office at 057 8662120 or email: admin@icsaireland.com before June 15

SEPTEMBER 30th DUBLIN/PARIS

- * Departure from DUBLIN (flight to be confirmed)
- * Transfer Charles-de-Gaulle Airport to Paris city centre
- * Check-in for one night in a city centre 3*hotel
- * Dinner and cruise on the Seine river (optional)
- * Overnight in Paris



OCTOBER 1st PARIS/RUNGIS/NEVERS

- * Early breakfast departure
- * Transfer from the hotel to RUNGIS, the world's biggest food market where 1200 companies trade (wholesalers, producers, brokers, central purchasing agencies, etc) - www.rungismarket.com
- * 7 am : Visit and meetings in the meat sector
- * Breakfast à Rungis
- * En route to Nevers
- * Late lunch (included in the package)
- * Visit of the Charolaise breeding HQ: Ferme du Marault - www.charolais-marault.com
- * Dinner and overnight in 3* hotel in Nevers or surroundings



OCTOBER 2nd NEVERS/CLERMONT-FERRAND

- * Breakfast
- * Departure to Magny-cours racing circuit + karting experience (optional): Visit of the Formula 1 World Championship circuit which has celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. This visit will be followed by a karting training session
- OR**
- * En route to Clermont-Ferrand with visits of Charolais breed farms on the way
- * Check-in at your apart hotel (city centre of Clermont-Ferrand)
- * Dinner (none included in the package)
- * Overnight



OCTOBER 3th CLERMONT-FERRAND / SOMMET DE L'ELEVAGE

- * Breakfast
- * Transfer to Sommet de l'Elevege (public transport)
- * Full day visit at Sommet de l'Elevege
- * Dinner (non included in the package)

OCTOBER 4th CLERMONT-FERRAND / LIMOGES

- * Breakfast
- * Transfer to Sommet de l'Elevege (public transport)
- * 1/2 day visit at Sommet de l'Elevege
- * Lunch (non included in the package)
- * En route to Limoges with visits of Limousine breed farms on the way
- * Check-in at your hotel (city center of Limoges)

- * Guided tour of Clermont-Ferrand (optional)
- * Dinner (non included in the package)

OCTOBER 5th LIMOGES / POLE DE LANAUD / PARIS / CDG AIRPORT

- * Breakfast
- * Transfer to Limousine Breeding HQ: Pole de Lanaud - www.limousine.org
- * 1/2 day visit
- * Transfer to Limoges Railway station
- * En route to Paris by train
- * Transfer from Paris Railway Station to CDG Airport (public transport) Or private transfer (optional)
- * Return to Dublin : latest flight

PRICE INCLUDES:

- 3 professional visits (Rungis, Marault Center / Charolaise & Pole de Lanaud / Limousine)
- 5 night accommodation, breakfast inclusive (1 night in Paris, 1 night in Nevers or surrounding, 2 nights in Clermont-Ferrand and 1 night in Limoges) - based twin bedroom sharing in 3* hotels
- Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner on October 1st
- Private coaching service on September 30th, October 1st, 2nd, 4th & 5th - Public coaching on October 3rd, 4th morning and 5th afternoon
- Bi-lingual assistance during the trip
- Interpreter for visits
- Show entrance
- Travel insurance
- Return flights Dublin/Paris/Dublin

DOES NOT INCLUDE :

- Other meals than those mentioned above
- Single bedroom : on request with supplement





SHEEP2012

Teagasc, Mellows Campus, Athenry, Co. Galway
Saturday, 30 June 2012, 10am

This major sheep open day will bring together all interested in the sheep sector to highlight its potential. Organised by Teagasc, UCD, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Irish Farmers Journal, Bord Bia and Sheep Ireland, the open day will feature:

- Sheep Seminars and Workshops
- Teagasc Research Demonstration Flock
- National Sheep Breed Competitions
- Commercial Exhibits
- Sheep Dog Trials and Training Demonstrations
- Bord Bia Cookery Demonstrations
- Wool Village

Topics covered will include:

- Animal Health
- Grassland Management
- Sheep Breeding
- Marketing of Lamb

Kepak is the overall sponsors of Sheep 2012, with additional sponsorship from MSD animal health, Pfizer, FBD, Novartis & Cormac Engineering of Tuam.

Admission free

All welcome

Email: sheep2012@teagasc.ie