



ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin and CAP committee chair Billy Gray loading straw bound for West Cork at Billy's farm near Rathangan, Co. Kildare, as part of ICSA's West Cork Fodder Relief Initiative

## Weather Woes

**A** good first week of weather in September may yet turn out to be the saviour for many farmers but nothing can detract from the fact that 2012 has truly been a challenging year for farming. For most farmers, a costly year, for some farmers a disaster.

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin was the first farm leader to respond to the crisis when he visited some of the worst hit farmers in West Cork in late August. Like other parts of the country much of Cork has managed to

make silage even if it was late and conditions were bad. But on the heavy, marginal land between Macroom and Bantry many farms had no silage made at all by late August.

Ground was simply too wet to travel. As one farmer put it, referring to a field with a fairly steep slope, "you'd get into it all right and get down to the bottom of the field, but

you couldn't get back up again."

West Cork chairman Dermot Kelleher had been vocal about the problems down there which was



A recent photograph of heavily waterlogged land in County Clare

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what led Gilmartin to make the trip.

On a national scale, it is still early to understand exactly how the bad year will impact farmers. Almost at the last minute, a lot of progress was made with cereal harvesting and the straw will definitely be a bonus that looked unlikely even in late August. Still, farmers are trying to assess the feed situation on-farm. Many farmers were forced to house stock on and off throughout the summer and consequently many have reduced the winter fodder stocks significantly.

While weather has been the catalyst, falling livestock prices, rising feed costs, financial stress and bureaucratic pressures have magnified the problem.

### LIVESTOCK MARKETS

Meat factories pulled prices by over 30c/kg since early June, even as prices in the UK and Europe have been edging upwards. The challenge now is for farmers to resist further price cuts which may be more feasible if weather settles and ground conditions show an improvement for the autumn.

One unfortunate reality is that the decline in live exports in 2011 will translate into extra cattle in the next six months. Live exports in 2011 were some 40% lower than in 2010 and the trend for 2012 shows another 40% drop on a year to date basis. Hopefully there are signs that things may be about to stabilise and possibly improve on the live exports front as our stock becomes more competitive.

Consignments of live cattle have gone to new exotic markets such as Kazakhstan (ranked 142nd in world soccer) and Tunisia with a lot of talk about Libya. However, the reality is that our most important live export markets will continue to be EU destinations such as Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Spain.

By and large, these markets did not see the same beef rise that we experienced in Ireland in the January 2011 to June 2012 period. In fact, by June 2012 Irish beef price compared favourably with all continental markets. So much so that it was inevitable that live exports would suffer. However, since then, Irish beef price has slipped back while continental and UK prices continue to improve. The hope is that this will give a boost to live exports.

Overall, you would have to be optimistic that cattle prices here will not fall any further and may harden somewhat before the year end but don't expect any major upward surge.

### FEED COSTS

Feed costs have become a huge factor in determining viability. While livestock prices are much better than two years ago, costs have also escalated. Ration price continues to rise with most rations now costing €300+, blown in.

While an improvement in weather has led to a major turn-around in the cereal harvest here, no weather improvement will fix the drought problems in the USA and Russia at this stage. This is leading to huge scarcities for all ration ingredients. With over 80% of the US soybean crop hit by drought, soya has hit record highs. On

a slightly positive note, there is likely to be record outputs of maize in Brazil and indications are that cereal prices have stabilised somewhat in the past month on global markets.

Nonetheless, Irish farmers are faced with huge difficulties. For most extra ration will be required to compensate for lower quality silage and some farmers will be faced with assessing whether it makes better sense to buy straw and silage or more ration. Teagasc has been advising farmers to get out with nitrogen in early September as the response could be very worthwhile if weather stabilises.

### FINANCIAL STRESS

Extra costs associated with feeding cattle indoors during the summer months are a huge contributory factor to a worsening cash flow scenario on many farms. Farmers are under pressure and in many cases, need better credit facilities from banks. While the banks claim to be open for business, some farmers are reporting a negative response. Ideally, a farmer needs to contact his bank and set out his case for more flexible credit. Products such as the AIB credit line tend to have much more favourable interest rates than the traditional overdraft but it's not clear how many farmers are on this.

### BUREAUCRATIC PRESSURES

As if all the weather and financial woes weren't enough, there is the old bug bear of bureaucracy. Yet again, we have conclusive evidence that calendar dates for spreading slurry etc are totally unworkable with such unpredictable weather. Yet we still have no action from

the Government on the ludicrous situation of closing dates for slurry spreading of October 15 (November 1st for farmyard manure). It is obvious that many farmers could do nothing for most of the summer and need a lot more flexibility on this.

There are also alarming stories of totally intransigent inspections, under cross compliance, which take no account of the physical impossibility of coping with extreme weather. One farmer was told that he shouldn't have

baled the silage because it was too wet. What was he to do? Leave it rot in the ground? It is also inevitable that even with the best will, poaching is inescapable this year. The Department needs to show common sense on these issues because the reality is that many farmers are close to a mental breaking point. There is surely a higher responsibility on those in power to make allowances for this rather than be obsessed with ticking bureaucratic boxes and keeping our European masters happy.

### ICSA ACTION ON THE CRISIS

1. Helped with emergency deliveries of fodder to the worst affected farmers in places such as West Cork and we stand ready to help other farmers where the need is urgent.
2. Demanding that the Government immediately suspend the Nitrates closing dates for slurry spreading till at least December 1st.
3. Calling on banks to prioritise credit to ordinary farmers for working capital and to be flexible on increasing overdrafts and credit lines.
4. Fought for an early payment of the Single Payment on October 16 and insisting that the DAS is paid before the ploughing.
5. Holding meetings in worst hit areas such as West Cork where Teagasc provided a local advisor to give advice on winter feed strategies.
6. Participating on crisis task force set up in Clare by the Teagasc CAO to organise a co-ordinated response to the weather crisis and will be happy to help out with other similar initiatives.
7. Will press for a more understanding inspections regime at Farmers Charter and with the Minister.
8. Available at the ploughing for individual consultations on feed problems, financial difficulties or mental strain.
9. Participating in See Change (see article on p.5) – help is available for farmers who are stressed
10. Working to ensure that live exports to new destinations are assisted with a view to supporting livestock prices here. ICSA has facilitated visits of German finishers who potentially could be customers for weanlings and we are also fully behind efforts to export cattle to North African and Eastern markets such as Kazakhstan.

More info on ICSA & See Change – page 5

# President's Address

**Gabriel Gilmartin - President, ICSA**

**In the last edition of Drystock Farmer, I made the point that it was hard to know what summer 2012 had in store for farmers. No one could have foreseen what was to come.**

What we have had is nothing short of a disastrous summer, which has had a huge knock-on effect on all aspects of farming and food production. The rainfall has been catastrophic, and has made the business of running a farm exceptionally difficult. Met Eireann's Summer 2012 Report makes for stark reading. Rainfall totals were above average everywhere, with Cork Airport recording its wettest summer since 1962; while sunshine totals were also below average almost everywhere - Valentia Observatory and Cork Airport reported their dullest summers in 32 years and 26 years respectively.

Many farmers have been left in an extremely tough situation as a result of the weather conditions. On a recent visit to farms in West Cork, I saw cattle housed since July, with little or no fodder left in the yard to feed them, and not a single blade of silage cut. After hearing from dozens of farmers at a fodder crisis meeting in Dunmanway, organised by West Cork ICSA, ICSA gathered the troops and organised and subsidised the delivery of bales of straw to West Cork. It was an excellent display

of farmers helping other farmers, rather than waiting for outside help or look for funding that may or may not exist.

This brings me to the issue of so-called 'calendar farming'. It has never been more important to end this nonsense of setting strict deadlines for vital, weather-dependent farming activities. A bad situation on many farms is being made considerably worse by the looming deadlines for the likes of spreading slurry and fertilizer. It's gone beyond a simple extension of the deadlines. What we need now is for the legislators to realise that these rules are making a tough job impossible, and that farmers need to be able to do their work as and when the weather and ground conditions allow.

The price of fuel has also increased this summer. The bills being faced by the farming sector, particularly agricultural contractors, are shocking. ICSA is calling on the Government to suspend the carbon tax in order to alleviate some of the pressure on farm businesses. There is far too much tax and duty on fuel, and the carbon tax paid by farmers alone amounts to tens of millions of euro per year. Suspending the carbon tax would be a very minor step for the Government which would make a big difference to farmers.

At the time of going to print, the report

of the Capital Asset Implementation Group is yet to be published. There has been a huge amount of wrong information and hearsay about farmers and 3rd level grants. ICSA has called on Minister Quinn and the Labour party chairman, Colm Keaveney, to clear up the misinformation about farmers and third level grants. Capital assets, such as farmland, are simply tools of the trade. To include them, as ICSA has argued since the changes were first mentioned as a possibility, would amount to blatant discrimination against farming families,



and put them at an intolerable disadvantage in terms of access to higher education. Rest assured that ICSA is fighting these proposals in the strongest terms.

Of course, everything I have discussed above is putting incredible pressure on farmers and their families. ICSA is doing what it can to reduce the pressure in practical ways - take the

West Cork fodder relief initiative for example - and we are always available to our members for advice and help where needed. As well as this, ICSA has recently joined up as partners with See Change, a group working hard to reduce the stigma attached to mental health difficulties. We see a great need for greater supports for the farming sector when times are tough.

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## EAZY CALVER



# ICSA fighting hard against changes to third level grants

**A**t the time of going to print, the much anticipated report from the Capital Assets Implementation Group, set up by Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn, has yet to be published. Since the idea of including capital assets in the assessment for the third level grant first surfaced, ICSA has been unequivocal in its opposition. An intensive lobbying campaign of TDs all over the country has been launched by ICSA; and ICSA has also made a comprehensive submission to the implementation group. That submission can be viewed in full on the ICSA website – [www.icsaireland.com](http://www.icsaireland.com), on the Policy Submissions page.

In the previous edition of this publication, we described Minister Quinn's proposals as hitting the 'easy target' for savings. The situation has gotten much more serious since then, with lots of misinformation floating around in the form of hearsay and anecdotes. Responding to the inaccuracies – which were widely reported in the national media - ICSA president, Gabriel Gilmartin called on the Minister and the Labour party Chairman, Colm Keaveney to clear up any misunderstandings. Gilmartin said, "The biggest lie is the notion that the system allows a farmer to buy, for example, a tractor and use the full cost of that tractor to wipe out income, thereby qualifying the farmer's child for a third level grant. The truth, as Minister Quinn and Deputy Keaveney should know well, is that such investments are not allowable when calculating eligibility for the grant. In fact, all capital investments, including farm



ICSA members lobbying Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, on the third level grants issue in 2011

machinery, livestock housing and pollution control facilities are expressly excluded - not only under the new system operated by SUSI (the new, centralised grant application system) but also under the old local authority/VEC application system."

In fact, the rules for assessing eligibility for third level grants state clearly that interest incurred on borrowings for such investments is also not allowed, nor is the leasing cost of machinery. This actually puts farm families at a significant disadvantage compared to other sectors. Farmers need to reinvest in their businesses in order to remain viable - or in some cases, in order to comply with Department of Agriculture regulations - and this reinvestment, and associated interest charges, means that there is much less money left to put food on the table or to pay for their kids' education costs.

Mr Gilmartin also argued that the perception that farmers can manipulate their income

in order to have a "bad year" for the purposes of grant assessment is incorrect. "The reality is that farm incomes are volatile and can fluctuate dramatically from year to year. This is more and more a feature of farming, as the CAP is now more oriented towards direct payments for environmental goals, rather than price support. To illustrate this reality, the average farm income two years ago was €11,968 according to the Teagasc National Farm Survey for 2009, compared with €24,361 for 2011. Incomes for 2012 are likely to be down again."

To counteract the campaign of misinformation, ICSA has produced a leaflet, addressing the myths and misconceptions surrounding farmers and the third level grants means test and outlining what the proposed changes would mean for farming families. The key messages and concerns highlighted in this leaflet are:

- That farmers tend to be asset rich but income poor

- What assets would be taken into account if the changes are brought into force?
- Why is there so much doubt and suspicion around farm incomes?
- Why not assess income over several years, e.g. 7 years?
- Why should a farmer be expected to dispose of assets to pay for education, when this will only serve to damage future earning potential?

This leaflet is being sent to all TDs as just one part of the lobbying campaign ICSA is undertaking ahead of the issue being debated in the Dáil after the summer recess.

It goes without saying that many farming families will be left out in the cold, and be put under severe pressure to fund higher education for their children if Minister Quinn's proposals are not defeated. ICSA is working on a continuous basis to ensure that he does not gain the support he needs to carry them through, and ensure that the children of farmers are not discriminated against when it comes to equal access to third level education.



# ICSA enters mental health partnership with See Change

Geoff Hamilton,  
ICSA Policy Officer

**T**he ICSA Policy Committee have noted that the promotion of mental wellbeing is of key importance in rural communities, particularly in the context of the poor farming conditions to date in 2012. We are all aware of the stresses of daily farming life, but during times of additional pressure due to weather, isolation, finance or family problems, our mental health, and that of those around us, needs to be looked after. While much has been done in recent years to promote the physical health and safety of farmers, mental wellbeing is less often discussed. This is a problem that needs to be tackled if we are to foster a supportive community among farmers. It is felt that by driving the discussion about mental health, feelings of isolation and social exclusion that many farmers endure can be broken. This will contribute to challenging the stigma of mental health problems.

In this context, ICSA entered a partnership agreement with See Change in August 2012. See Change is a network of organisations which aims to promote the discussion of mental health among the farming community and tackle the stigma attached to mental health problems.

See Change is a national programme working to change minds about mental health problems in Ireland. Over fifty Irish organisations made up of member associations, state agencies, universities and youth groups make up the See Change partnership. These are now working together to create a community-driven social movement to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems. Part of the See Change mission is to ensure that everyone enjoys the same rights on an equal basis.

Findings from a See Change benchmark study in 2010 on public attitudes to mental health problems identified a number of key target groups, including farmers and people living in rural communities. This research identified that the stigma surrounding mental health problems acts as a significant issue for Irish farmers, often preventing people from seeking the help that they need.

In the 2010 survey of over 900 adults:



As a result, See Change is committed to working closely with Ireland's farmers and is engaging with all the Irish Farming Organisations to highlight these issues.

As a See Change Partner Organisation, ICSA will be active on several fronts aimed at providing supports for farmers and tackling the stigma of mental health problems. In late September/October, a working group will be established, made up of members from organisations which target the farming community. ICSA will be represented on the working group by Policy Officer Geoff Hamilton and Rural Development Chairman John Barron. The group will also have representatives from See Change, IFA, ICMSA, Macra na Feirme and the Department of Agriculture. It will be the objective of this working group to plan and deliver a nationwide mental health campaign that will specifically focus on the needs of Ireland's farming community.

At this early stage, it is envisaged that ICSA will contribute to this campaign through the publication of a new mental health resource booklet for members, targeted presentations or workshops at upcoming Association events and delivery of press material to the national and local media. The vision of See Change is that every person in Ireland can be open and positive about their own and other's mental health. ICSA shares this vision, and hopes that this new partnership will facilitate better mental health awareness in its members and will facilitate improved future supports for rural dwellers during times of increased stress or hardship.

For more information on the See Change Partnership, visit [www.seechange.ie](http://www.seechange.ie).



## WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE:

- an environment where people can be more open and positive in their attitudes and behaviour towards mental health;
- greater understanding and acceptance of people with mental health problems;
- greater understanding and knowledge of mental health problems and of health services that provide support for mental health problems; and
- a reduction in the stigma associated with mental health problems and challenge discrimination.

## OUR MESSAGES

- Mental health problems can affect anyone at any time during their lives
- Mental health problems are part and parcel of being human
- People with mental health problems can and do recover
- People affected by mental health problems are entitled to the same human rights as everybody else in society without discrimination
- Every person – whether you have been personally touched by mental health problems or not – has the power to help stop the stigma and discrimination of mental health problems

To achieve our objectives, See Change works within a number of inter-related settings. See Change is about finding the conversation, joining in and working with people and communities to change minds about mental health problems in Ireland. We take an approach that includes the following;

- grassroots activity like town hall meetings, community events, supporting local groups
- partner activity where we work with over 40 organisations to share capacity and mobilise change online through campaigns like Make a Ripple, our social networks and our e-news service
- workplace settings where we train employers and employees to promote positive attitudes to mental health

# News Briefs Compiled by Kathy McKenna

**NEW THINKING NEEDED ON AGRICULTURAL EMISSIONS**

The Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association agrees with the finding of the ESRI that a new deal is needed on agricultural emissions targets for Europe.

The ESRI's Environment Review 2012 finds that if we are to meet the targets for increased agricultural production under Food Harvest 2020, Ireland will struggle to meet its emissions obligations.

ICSA President Gabriel Gilmartin said, "on the one hand, Food Harvest 2020 says we must strive to dramatically increase agricultural production – but on the other, we are expected to reduce the emissions from farming activities. The two targets are incompatible."

As a whole, Ireland is supposed to reduce its emissions by 20% by the year 2020. ICSA is of the opinion that this is much too onerous, as agriculture as an industry is proportionately far more significant here than in other EU countries.

Mr. Gilmartin said, "I totally agree with the ESRI's suggestion that a new mechanism is needed for managing agricultural emissions in Ireland. A blunt focus on emissions reduction in Ireland could lead to more production being moved overseas, and Ireland will lose the potential to expand output and create jobs. If this was to happen, the environmental benefits may be less than if production was kept within the EU, where cross-compliance and

other measures ensure higher environmental standards."

**BRADY CALLS FOR CRACKDOWN ON SHEEP SMUGGLING**

ICSA sheep chairman Paul Brady has called for a crackdown on sheep smuggling from Northern Ireland.

Not only does the influx of sheep from the north add to the kill here and depress the price for farmers in the Republic, it also costs the exchequer significant sums in flat rate VAT refunds each year.

"A lamb bought in Northern Ireland, smuggled into the Republic, is worth the additional VAT in the south. At present lamb prices, this amounts to about €5 per lamb," said Mr Brady.

He suggests that close co-operation between the Gardai, the Department of Agriculture and the Revenue Commissioners could help stamp out the problem. "For example, the supply of sheep tags should be more carefully monitored."

"We definitely don't want to create more bureaucracy, but where the practice of smuggling results in a lower price for our farmers, then it is time for us to act," concluded Mr Brady.

**ICSA CALLS FOR LENIENCY ON INSPECTIONS**

ICSA president, Gabriel Gilmartin, has issued an appeal to farm inspectors to make allowances for the serious effect the



ICSA is calling for leniency in farm inspections: The scene at a farm in West Cork, where cattle have been fed silage in the yard since mid-summer

current heavy rainfall is having on farms across the country.

Mr. Gilmartin said, "We are conscious that the Department must carry out inspections, and that they cannot be cancelled or postponed. However, meeting the required standard under recent weather conditions will be extremely difficult and I hope that inspectors recognise this when they visit farms."

"For example, poaching is at a serious level in many areas, cattle are inside and land is too wet to spread slurry so tanks are full. Heavy crops of rushes are also problematic – but the weather at the moment means they can't be sprayed or cut."

Mr. Gilmartin concluded, "Farmers are under huge pressure after the rainfall. I am appealing to the inspectors, to take the effect of the bad weather into account."

**ICSA WELCOMES ADVANCE SINGLE FARM PAYMENT**

ICSA president, Gabriel Gilmartin said there will be sighs of relief from farmers across the

country, as he welcomed the agreement reached in Brussels recently which provides for the advance payment of 50% of the Single Farm Payment.

It means that farmers whose SFP applications have been confirmed fully clear, will receive the advance on October 16th this year, with the balance being paid out on December 1st.

Mr. Gilmartin said, "Farmers are facing astronomical increases in feed costs for the rest of the year as a result of the bad weather, the full impact of which is yet to be seen. I am relieved to see that the Minister for Agriculture successfully argued the case for the advance payment."

He concluded, "It is now vitally important that every effort is made to ensure that direct payments end up in farmers' accounts as soon as possible."

Banks will have to play their part in getting through looming winter fodder crisis

President of the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association, Gabriel Gilmartin, says

banks have to recognise that they will have to play their part in allowing farmers to trade through the looming winter fodder crisis.

Mr. Gilmartin made the comments following the release of a Teagasc survey, showing that 15 per cent of drystock farmers say they will be short of silage for next winter. "There is no doubt that this is going to have a serious impact on cashflow on Irish farms. Farmers are going to have to spend their way out of this situation, because there is no other solution to a fodder shortage other than to buy in supplementary feed. Traditionally, straw is used as an alternative to silage – but we don't know what the straw supply will be like because the corn hasn't been cut yet."

"This is where the banks come in. They must sit up and recognise the reality of what's happening on the farms. They cannot continue to ignore the needs of their farming customers. We must be allowed to access credit and trade through what we know will be a very tough winter," Mr. Gilmartin concluded.

**ICSA WARNING ON IN-CALF HEIFERS**

ICSA suckler chairman Dermot Kelleher has reminded farmers to be careful about inadvertently selling heifers in-calf. Mr Kelleher said that the weanling trade is damaged when farmers or exporters buy heifers that subsequently turn out to be in-calf.

"Farmers need to take

precautions such as separating weanling bulls and weanling heifers on time. Where there is doubt, farmers should consider scanning but only after 35 days have elapsed since heifers were in contact with bulls. Scanning is more cost effective than injecting heifers especially when it can be combined with scanning cows which is normal practice on many suckler farms."

**ICSA SAYS MORE LIVE EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES MUST BE SOUGHT OUT**

ICSA beef committee chairman, Edmond Phelan, says there is an urgent need for more live exports for Irish cattle, given that domestic prices have taken a significant hit in recent weeks.

Mr. Phelan said, "Prices for beef have spiralled downwards in the last number of weeks – so

much so that many beef producers have seen their profit margins almost completely eroded. Irish prices are now up to €300 per head behind British prices. The main reason for this is that the extremely bad weather has given farmers very little choice but to sell their cattle; the factories know this and are taking advantage of the fact by cutting prices dramatically. This leaves finishers who bought cattle when they were very dear in the last 12 months in a very tough situation."

"What we need is to create more competition so that we're at least in with a shot of getting a decent price for the cattle we are producing. We know that long term prospects are being developed with countries such as China and I am fully behind these efforts – but what I am calling

for now is a parallel focus on increasing live exports immediately, in order to alleviate the pressure currently being felt as factories squeeze prices further and further. There are indications that a number of countries in North Africa are potential customers for Irish cattle and possibilities like this need to be developed to the fullest extent."

**ONE SMALL CUT FOR GOVERNMENT – ONE GIANT LEAP FOR BUSINESS**

ICSA is calling on the Government to suspend the carbon tax to alleviate pressure on businesses, particularly farm business, as Irish farming attempts to deal with one of the toughest years in recent times.

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin said, "Fuel prices are set to rise to shocking levels in the

coming weeks, and I dread to think of the bills that the farming sector, particularly agricultural contractors, will face when they go to fill their tanks with diesel. That being the case, the carbon tax is making significant inroads into farmers' ability to produce at competitive prices."

"At the moment the carbon tax comes in at over 6 cent per litre on green diesel (or €20/tonne – up from €15/ tonne before May 1st, 2012). That's a very significant amount of money when you consider how many litres would be put into the tank of a combine harvester, for example. In fact, Teagasc estimated that the carbon tax was costing farmers €24million per year at the €15/tonne rate. It follows that the current rate of €20/tonne is costing farmers in the region of €32million a year. The fact that there is a double offset for carbon tax against

income tax for farmers is not particularly helpful – it's administratively very difficult, and varies depending on which rate of income tax you're on. Moreover, the double offset only applies to the increased carbon tax which came in on May 1st this year, and is therefore of very limited benefit."

"With 2012 looking like being one of the toughest years faced by the entire agricultural sector in recent times, and fears already mounting about a rise in how much it will cost Irish consumers to put food on the table in the coming months, now is the time for the Government to do what it can to ease the pressure on both farmers and consumers."

Mr. Gilmartin concluded, "Suspending the carbon tax would be one small cut for Government – one giant leap for business competitiveness."



Before you start using machinery on the farm, always check for the presence of overhead electricity lines where you are working. Ensure that everyone observes safe working practices wherever overhead lines cross the farmland and whenever you are close to electric fencing. Coming into contact, or near contact, with overhead electricity lines can be fatal. Extra care should be taken when using tractors with front loader: slurry spreaders, trailers with highloads and harvesters. In case of emergency, call ESB Networks on 1850 372 999.



[www.esb.ie/esbnetworks](http://www.esb.ie/esbnetworks)



# Course of CAP reform talks strongly influenced by ICSA

**W**hile all's quiet in the EU at the moment, ICSA has been very busy on the topic of CAP reform over the summer months.

In the previous Drystock Farmer, you will have read about ICSA's pro-active movements on CAP reform – with Minister for Agriculture, Simon Coveney TD discussing the issue with members of the ICSA National Executive at a meeting in Dublin, and a delegation representing ICSA before a meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture in Leinster House. ICSA's contribution to that meeting has been included in the committee's official policy document, which has been sent to Brussels for consideration.

In the meantime, a delegation from ICSA travelled to Brussels in June to observe a European Parliament agriculture committee debate on the amendments to the Ciolos proposals put forward by European Parliament rapporteur, Luis Capoulas Santos. MEP Santos produced a document containing a series of amendments to the original reform proposals put forward by Agriculture Commissioner, Dacian Ciolos. The delegation was led by ICSA president, Gabriel Gilmartin, along with general secretary



Deputy Martin Heydon and ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin at the ICSA CAP meeting in Athy in June

Eddie Punch and ICSA CAP committee chairman, Billy Gray. The purpose of the trip was to carefully monitor the reaction to the Santos amendments, and to lobby the Irish MEPs on behalf of Irish farmers. While in Brussels, ICSA met with MEPs including Mairead McGuinness, Jim Higgins, and Sean Kelly, and also with Dermot Ryan, of the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union. For the first time, MEPs have co-decision on CAP reform and ICSA is using the opportunity to influence the course of the ongoing reform negotiations. Speaking in Brussels, Mr.

Gilmartin said, "It is still possible that Ireland can influence this and ICSA is determined that we have to fight hard to ensure our current decoupled system is defended to the greatest extent possible."

Following the trip to Brussels, ICSA's CAP committee met early in the summer for a comprehensive discussion of the Santos amendments. ICSA is of the opinion that the Santos report identifies the key problem – but fails to recognise the severity of it. As a consequence, ICSA is arguing, its proposal to limit the losses by 30% for farmers whose current entitlements are above the

flat rate average of €270 does not go far enough.

That being the case, the CAP committee debated and agreed upon a number of further amendments to those contained in the Santos report. These were then the subject of a lively discussion at a National Executive meeting, where ICSA's official position on the current reform proposals was officially adopted.

In a nutshell, ICSA is pushing for the following:

- That no farmer would see their Single Farm Payment cut by more than 10% by 2019

- Rejection of Commissioner Ciolos' proposal for a flat rate per-hectare payment by 2019

- Targeted and substantial increases for active, deserving farmers, including young farmers

ICSA then embarked upon the first in a series of CAP reform public meetings, at the Clanard Court Hotel in Athy, on the 21st of June. MEP Liam Aylward and Oireachtas Agriculture Committee member Deputy Martin Heydon were guest speakers at the event. Gabriel Gilmartin took the opportunity to call on

the Taoiseach and the Minister for Agriculture to put a "huge effort" into getting agreement on the overall EU budget as quickly as possible, so that progress can be made on the CAP budget. Mr. Gilmartin also outlined to those at the meeting that one of the other big concerns is the desire of Commissioner Ciolos to bring in a flat rate payment per hectare – which ICSA says, "might work in theory but not in practice".

ICSA general secretary Eddie Punch gave a comprehensive presentation of the current state of play in the CAP negotiations. Mr. Punch presented case studies showing the financial effect that will be felt by Irish farmers should either the Ciolos or Santos proposals be carried – and also presented the alternative strategy being pushed by the ICSA, which would see less cuts to Single Farm Payments in Ireland, while making the payments more targeted and efficient.

A similar meeting was then held in Sligo in July, with guest speaker Marian Harkin MEP and also attended by Deputy Michael Colreavy and Senator Marc MacSharry. The issue of coupled payments in particular was discussed at this meeting, with MEP Harkin outlining that she has had several enquiries as to whether it might be worth considering bringing back some form of coupled payments system. Both Eddie Punch and Gabriel Gilmartin were adamant that the idea of returning to any form of coupled payments is

being rejected outright by ICSA. Mr. Gilmartin said, "The reality is that decoupling has played a key role in increased livestock prices for both cattle and sheep. While meat factories are actively supporting a return to the old systems of premia, that's only because they want to pay less for stock. Farmers should be very wary of going back to the old ways."

"Getting your Single Payment cut and then getting it back with terms and conditions attached as a suckler premium or ewe premium is potentially disastrous because it will lead to increased numbers and more control of prices for factories. Any support scheme which artificially encourages farmers to keep more stock than the market wants can only lead to falling prices. It's not that long ago that farmers thought that 90p/lb was a good target for beef price."

With Ireland's term in the presidency of the European Union looming, ICSA is constantly pushing for progress in the talks and working to secure the best deal possible for Irish farmers from 2013 onwards. ICSA's position that no farmer should see their payment reduced by more than 10% at a maximum is already gathering strong support, with countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal aligned with the proposal. ICSA will continue with a programme of intensive engagement with the stakeholders to further the association's influence already visible in the talks.



MEP Marian Harkin, ICSA Connaught/Ulster vice president John Flynn, Deputy Michael Colreavy and ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin at the ICSA CAP meeting in Sligo in July



MEP Liam Aylward and ICSA general secretary, Eddie Punch in conversation at the ICSA CAP meeting in Athy in June



Senator Marc MacSharry, MEP Marian Harkin, ICSA Connaught/Ulster vice president John Flynn (who chaired the meeting), and ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin at the ICSA CAP meeting in Sligo in July

# Action needed on farm crime

Geoff Hamilton,  
ICSA Policy Officer

**CSA is again highlighting the ongoing problem of crime in rural areas. In recent months, several ICSA members or their neighbours have been targeted by criminals in episodes of burglary, livestock smuggling and theft of fuel, machinery and metal. Farms are considered as softer targets for criminals, owing mainly to the remote and extensive nature of many properties which are difficult to secure comprehensively.**

## Crime Statistics

Statistics from the Central Statistics Office show changes to recent crime patterns in Ireland. Unfortunately, the data is not presented in such a way that allows farm crime to be separated from other crime, but it can be assumed that any overall trends will be reflected in the numbers of farms affected. Shown here are two charts which compare the numbers of burglaries and thefts in the first quarters of 2010 and 2012. As can be seen, in the majority of Garda Divisions, burglary numbers have increased, with only Waterford, Galway and Mayo showing a decline. In almost half the Divisions, a rise in theft incidents was also recorded. Between mid 2010 and 2011, over 1,300 items of farm equipment were stolen, a 5% increase on the previous 12 months. Increased amounts of these thefts occur in the Spring and Autumn, which may be related to peak farming activity. Anecdotal evidence from 2012 suggests that this trend is continuing to increase,

with farms in border areas being particularly at risk. The increase in burglaries is of particular concern, as it may suggest that in some areas, criminals may be escalating from theft from yards to breaking and entering the family home. This has serious implications where personal safety is concerned. Last year, rural crime cost €4.2 million in Northern Ireland. A conservative estimate would therefore put the cost in the Republic at well over €20 million.

## ICSA Activities

The ongoing under-resourcing of the Gardai and the associated closure and/or downsizing of small local Garda stations can only be seen as contributing to the problem. ICSA will be lobbying the Department of Justice in this regard to prevent the further dilution of rural crime prevention services. In the context of the CAP reform discussions which will continue to run through 2012 and into 2013, ICSA aim to lobby strongly for a Rural Development funding allocation for farm security through technology solutions. Numerous new products are coming to the market, and ICSA will be pressing for these technologies to be rolled out in rural communities without excessive cost implications for farmers. Furthermore, it was proposed at the most recent Policy Committee meeting that regional policing partnerships should be explored as a means to develop supports for farmers and subsequently improve farm security. This will also be pursued under consultation with the members and any regional developments will be well publicized.

## What Can Members Do?

Above all, ICSA is promoting vigilance among farmers and the communities in which they live. The ICSA office staff are also open to documenting incidents of farm crime for publicity in the press as part of attempts to retrieve stolen property or livestock for members or their neighbours.

## Farm Security Tips

Protect your perimeter: Inspect boundary walls, fences and gates regularly. Gates should be securely fixed to sturdy concrete posts or similar. Hedge and fence breaches should be repaired as soon as possible.

Restrict access: Limit internal farm road access via padlocked gates and ensure visitors are supervised at all times. The characteristics of all callers should be noted (height, build, accent, hair colour, tattoos, nationality, car registration etc.)

Assess building security: Roofs should be examined for potential entry points though tile removal, and welded mesh should be installed as appropriate. Outbuilding doors are often the weak spot of building security; strong wood with deadlocks are a preferred solution to padlocks. Windows of houses should have appropriate locks fitted, while farm outbuilding windows should be barred where possible. Where buildings are considered at risk of ram-raiding, anti-ram barriers may be considered. High-value items such as small machinery, tools or horse tack should be stored in secure rooms out of sight of windows.

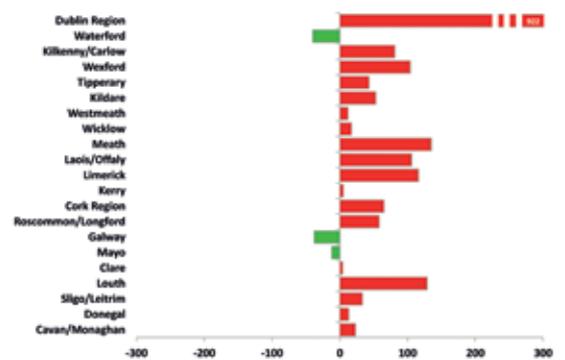


Chart: Burglaries (entering and theft from the home)

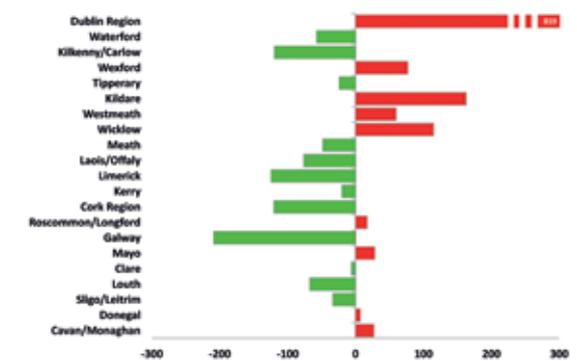


Chart: Thefts (of vehicles, machinery, fuel or other items from outside the home, such as yards)

Alarms and CCTV: Intruder alarms and/or video cameras may be installed as both a deterrent and an active response to trespassers. At minimum, the principal residence should be alarmed, preferably with telephone support. Security lighting of yards and around houses is strongly recommended.

Securing firearms: Firearms and all ammunition should be stored in a dedicated immovable firearm cabinet in the principal residence, away from points of entry.

Documenting and marking property: A physical record should be made of all identifiable items, in text and photographs (chassis and serial numbers should be recorded as appropriate). Valuable items should be marked in a manner that is difficult to remove, such as engraving. Additional marks should also be added that

are otherwise invisible, such as UV-sensitive ink. Several Irish companies operate a marking service to this effect. For small valuable items such as jewellery, a small safe may be a good investment.

Notify others when away: Should properties be left vacant while away for extended periods, it is recommended to notify the local Gardai and neighbours. A trusted person should act as a designated key holder.

Innovative ideas: Not all security solutions have to be costly. Dogs are the obvious farm guarding option, but having geese or even llamas on a farm may also be useful as these animals make a lot of noise and can be an excellent smuggling deterrent. Parking of old machinery in front of new equipment is a simple but effective solution.



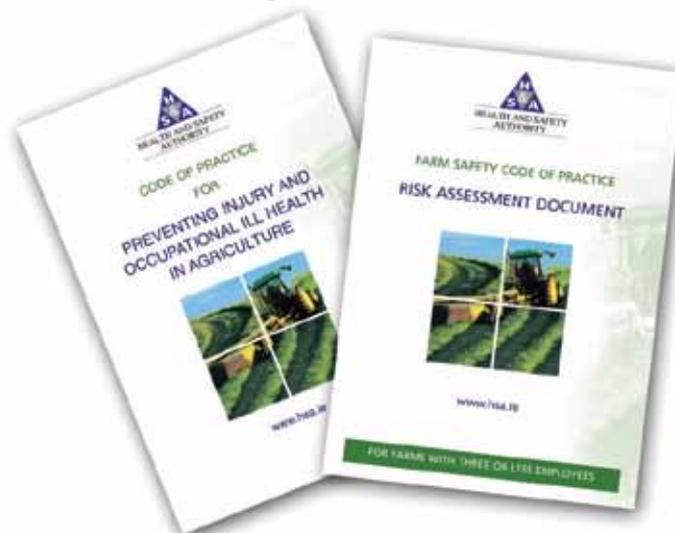
## I'm the lucky one.

My farm accident didn't kill me.  
Every two weeks, on average, someone  
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Life goes on for me and my family, but  
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# ICSA's brand new website!

ICSA is delighted to announce that our brand new website is now up and running – [www.icsaireland.com](http://www.icsaireland.com).

There you'll find all our latest news releases, a gallery of photographs from recent ICSA events as well as archive photographs, a calendar of upcoming ICSA events, contact details, and of course the all-important beef and sheep prices, which are updated on a weekly basis.

You'll also be able to download and read ICSA's submissions to Government on issues such as third level grants and Food Harvest 2020, read a detailed account of the association's history and policy background, and find out more about the benefits of being a member of ICSA.

One of the brand new features is a mobile-friendly version of the site where you can quickly and easily access the beef and sheep prices, as well as being able to explore the rest of the site easily from



your mobile.

We're always updating content and features on the site so let us know if there's something in particular you'd like to see on it, or feel free to give us your opinion if you feel

we can make any improvements – after all, it's designed especially for you, our members!

The new website will be officially launched during this year's National Ploughing

Championships, where we will also be running demonstrations of the new site for visitors to the ICSA marquee, where we will be delighted to give you the guided tour of the new and improved [www.icsaireland.com](http://www.icsaireland.com).

## ICSA gets to grips with weather chaos



ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin, West Cork national executive member Joe Burke, and general secretary Eddie Punch visiting farms in West Cork recently, which have been particularly badly hit by the disastrous summer weather.

# VISIT ICOSA AT THE NATIONAL PLOUGHING CHAMPIONSHIPS!

Find us in **Stand Number 347 (Row L, Block 2) (opposite the catering block)**

## WEATHER & FODDER CRISIS

Are you experiencing weather-related difficulties on your farm?

Worried about farm inspections and fodder levels?

**ICSA is here to help** – come and talk to us in confidence at the ICSA Fodder Crisis Clinic

## YOUNG FARMERS' CAP FOCUS GROUPS

Are you a young farmer?

Have **your** say on CAP and what it means for young farmers!

Join ICSA for a series of young farmer breakfast discussion groups taking place every morning at 10am, at the ICSA stand



## THIRD LEVEL GRANTS

Worried about proposals to take farm assets into account in the 3<sup>rd</sup> level grant means test?

Help ICSA fight against the inclusion of capital assets in higher education grant means test, which could deny **your** child access to a college education!

## LIVESTOCK PRICES

Worried about the downward trend, especially in beef prices?

What is it doing to **your** bottom line?

Come and talk to us at the ICSA stand throughout the Ploughing Championships, and help us fight against continuing factory price cuts

# ICSA/Irish Piemontese Society Farm Walk a great success



Piemontese/Limousin cross bull on Richard and Eamon Ryan's farm



Tasting the Piemontese beef

**O**ver a hundred people made the journey to the farm of Richard and Eamon Ryan, Coldfields, Thurles on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> of July, to take part in a farm walk to find out more about Piemontese cattle, and how suitable they might be for Irish suckler farmers. The event was one of a number of initiatives undertaken by the suckler committee over the summer that were both educational and social.

The father and son team are farming a herd of cross-bred Piemontese cattle, an Italian breed from the region of Piedmont which first came to Ireland in the 1980s, and is extremely popular in its native country, where it's known as the "Queen of Beef." Its popularity among Irish consumers is unusual in that it is slightly paler than most beef, is very lean and is low in cholesterol.

After the farm walk, the crowd listened to a number of speakers. Eamon Ryan himself, who is also a vet, talked about the system he and his father have in operation at Coldfields and the experiences they have had raising the Piemontese. Chiefly, he described them as having excellent temperaments and are very tolerant mothers. He said they also convert feed into beef very well and the kill out percentage is very high. He mentioned they make very good crosses with Limousin and Charolais.

ICSA member John Commins and neighbour of the Ryans' and spoke mainly about the type and quality of the beef from the Piemontese cattle, which, being very lean and tender, is strongly favoured in the European market. He also spoke about the health benefits of Piemontese beef with its low fat and cholesterol levels.

Teagasc adviser John Crosse was highly complementary about what he called the 'excellent' approach to husbandry, rearing and finishing evident on the Ryan farm.

ICSA Munster vice president, John Halley, was one of the organisers of the event and has himself recently bought a Piemontese bull. He is expecting the first batch of calves from him later this year. "I'm looking forward to some really super calves from this bull. I think the breed has huge potential for Irish beef farmers, particularly for export to the very lucrative Italian market, where Piemontese beef is considered to be top-of-the-range."



ICSA suckler chair Demot Kelleher, Munster vice president John Halley and beef chair Edmond Phelan

# Green Belt

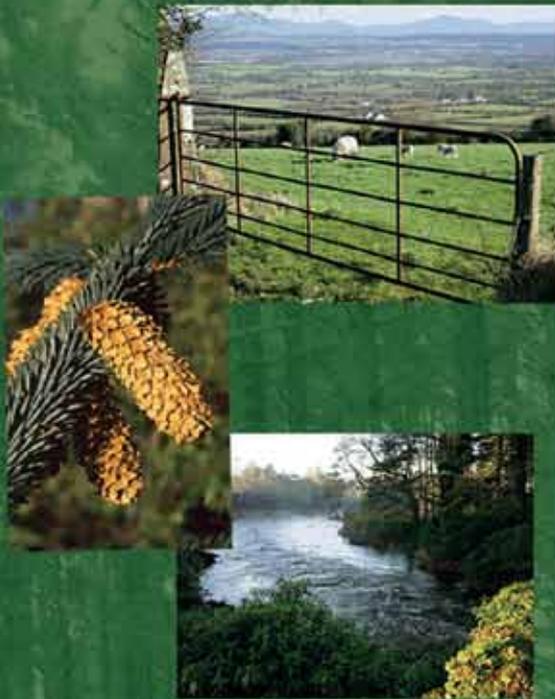
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## Join the Bord Bia Quality Assurance Scheme and share our passion for Irish food.

Securing access to the **EU's top retail groups**, along with **major foodservice and manufacturing companies** is critical to the future prospects of our **beef and lamb** sectors.

In general, our **highest paying customers** will only buy beef and lamb coming from **Quality Assured farms**. That means if your farm isn't a member of the Bord Bia **Beef and Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme (BLQAS)**, **you could be losing out**.

The Bord Bia Quality mark is our **guarantee to customers** that the beef and lamb they buy meets the **highest standards** with regard to **safe, sustainable food production, complete traceability and animal welfare**.

**Visit Bord Bia's stand at the National Ploughing Championships, opposite the Irish Farmers Journal.**

**Irish beef is now sold in more than 75 supermarket chains across EU markets, a higher number than beef of any other origin.**

**On the home market, Bord Bia's promotional program for Irish lamb focuses on Quality Assurance. Lamb consumption is now recovering strongly among Irish consumers.**

Your food is our passion

**Bord Bia**  
Irish Food Board



[bordbia.ie](http://bordbia.ie)

Scan here for more information on the Bord Bia Quality Mark.

