Drystockfarmer
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EU Budget deal makes CAP reform likely under Irish presidency

See Page 4

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin and general secretary Eddie Punch lobby An Taoiseach Enda Kenny during an interval in the recent EU Budget talks in Brussels

Lots of questions remain as horsemeat scandal goes global

Eddie Punch,
ICSA general secretary

With international brands such as Findus now implicated in the horsemeat scandal and countries as far apart as Romania, France and Poland caught up, there is a sense of relief that this is no longer a singular stain on Ireland's reputation.

The focus has switched from shoddy practices in certain processing plants to a more exotic coverage that would match the best fictional page turners. We are now told that this is a truly international conspiracy with criminal undertones, rogue traders and a labyrinth of sources of ingredients to make up the humble burger or lasagne.

At least it takes some of the focus off the reputation of Irish beef and suggests that Bord Bia now has a more favourable context for re-building confidence in Irish product. When news that horse DNA was detected in Irish burgers initially emerged on January 16, the shockwaves went right across global media.

Many were worried that we were back to the bad old days when Irish beef was continuously associated with the word 'crisis.'

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ALSO IN THIS **ISSUE**

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Horsemeat - continued from page 1

However, while Professor Alan Reilly of the FSAI was correct to say that this is now an international issue, we must avoid the conclusion that Irish firms are entirely without fault.

Many questions remain to be answered.

Why on earth was there any need to import meat ingredients into Ireland when we are exporting 90% of what we produce and are the largest beef exporters in the Northern hemisphere?

ABP need to be held to account here. It simply defies logic that ABP were completely unaware that Silvercrest Foods - a subsidiary- were sourcing product from abroad. Surely the obvious place for ABP - the biggest meat processing group in Ireland - to get meat is from another ABP plant? Did ABP tacitly condone the Silvercrest strategy to import cheaper meat?

If Silvercrest wished to import cheaper meat from Poland, then surely the first port of call would be ABP's plant in Poznan? Why would Silvercrest avoid going direct to their sister plant in Poland; instead preferring to deal with meat traders?

There may be perfectly logical reasons to go to a meat trader; but surely cutting out the middle-man is an essential element of keeping costs rock bottom? Especially, from the point of view of Silvercrest management, when there is a beef factory in Poland owned by your parent group.

It all makes the question of farm output expansion a sore one. For the past two years, Minister Coveney has championed the targets set out in the Food Harvest 2020 report, commissioned by his predecessor, Brendan Smith. In fact, the initial targets of a 20% expansion for beef outlined by the original Food Harvest committee were deemed not gung ho enough by an implementation committee on which senior employees of the beef-processing sector are represented. They felt confident enough to urge a 40% expansion by 2020.

It's going to take some sweet talking now from the industry and the Minister to convince farmers that expanding beef production is the way to go, when they see that cost-cutting at all costs is the mantra of the processing sector. What's the point in producing more beef when there are still a lot of horses wandering around? Is it any wonder that Irish beef price has been so static over the past 12 months?

Farmers are also furious at what they see as a double standard in terms of traceability and quality assurance. With over 7,000 on-farm inspections, many with little or no notice, and a regime where serious penalties are imposed even for a few tags missing or records only 95% up to date, farmers cannot comprehend how the real outrage has been going on unnoticed under our noses.

Credit is due to the FSAI for taking the initiative to DNA test and for blowing the whistle but there are plenty of indications that horsemeat has been finding its way into burgers for over a year. Nobody can really say for sure how long this has been going on.

ICSA honorary secretary John Cleary on Ear to the Ground (top) and general secretary Eddie Punch appearing on Ireland AM on TV3 (above) in reaction to the horse meat scandal

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin believes it will now take an EU Commission set of regulations to tidy up the mess. "It is now clear that despite all the EU regulations covering on-farm traceability, the major problems have been missed out on further down the food chain. Given what has emerged in recent days, it is clear that this is no longer a matter for individual member states but something that has to be dealt with on a pan-European basis".

"A key element of any regulation would be compulsory DNA testing done by the competent authorities in each state on an unannounced inspection basis. There needs to be a complete review of the role of meat traders and it seems that there is an urgent need to look at what licensing conditions should be imposed on them."

The ICSA president also took a shot at big food companies and retailers:

"While we can blame criminal conspiracies and rogue traders all we like, the fact is that companies like Findus need to get their act together in terms of realising that there is a limit to how cheap food can be, and that there is an onus on them to be more vigilant about the ingredients they use. The same criticism applies to retailing giants who apparently believed that a burger could be sold for less than 20c using only Irish and British beef, despite the massive increases in recent years in the costs of feeding cattle."

It's clear that supermarkets have escaped the worst of public anger. Companies like Tesco were quick to withdraw products and apologise to consumers. Tesco were quick to clarify that their contract with Silvercrest specified that only Irish or British beef should be used in burgers.

Nonetheless, they have questions to answer. How much were they paying Silvercrest for a burger? Did it ever occur to them that there is a limit to how cheap food can be? And how do they justify charging 3 or 4 times less for a product that some people give their child for dinner than a packet of chewing gum?

ICSA IN THE MEDIA

- Farming Independent (front page)
- Ear to the Ground on RTE
- Ireland AM on TV3
- Morning Ireland on RTE Radio 1
- CountryWide on RTE Radio 1
- The Last Word on Today FM
- 9 News on RTE
- Newstalk Breakfast
- Newstalk Lunchtime
- The Irish Independent
- The Irish Times
- The Irish Examiner
- Farming Today on BBC Radio 4
- The Daily Telegraph

President's *Address*

Gabriel Gilmartin - President, ICSA

The past few months since the last edition of Drystock Farmer could scarcely have been more unprecedented or challenging.

Since that time, ICSA had a successful run at the 2012 National Ploughing Championships in New Ross, and had a capacity crowd at our AGM and Annual Conference in Dublin, at which Minister Simon Coveney was a speaker. We have held several meeting to discuss the crucial CAP issue and continue to work hard at home and in Europe to ensure we get the best possible CAP deal for Irish farmers.

However, one story has dominated: the horse meat scandal. As the article on the front page outlines, there are more questions than answers at this stage – but a few things are certain.

Firstly, the reputation of Irish beef remains impeccable. The thoroughness of on-farm traceability in Ireland has stood up to the scrutiny it has been placed under, and there is no doubt that the quality attributed to the beef produced by Irish farmers maintains its integrity.

It is also certain that the focus of quality assurance and standards must be switched to the meat processors. It is difficult to fully sum up the frustration of our members, who are put through the ringer in terms of inspections and traceability, and face serious penalties if mistakes are made. To see these efforts completely undermined further down the food chain is infuriating and worrying.

From the minute the story broke, ICSA's voice was loud and clear in support of Irish farmers and in condemnation of those who have so grossly tainted the name of Irish beef in their attempts to cut corners and maximise profits.

Another issue that we are very much active on at the moment is the changes to the rules on commonages. You will see more on this topic later in the issue (see page 14) but I want to say that ICSA is as concerned about the possible impacts of the proposed changes as our members are.

Of course, progress on the new CAP is at the core of ICSA's work. Just before going to print, I and ICSA colleagues travelled to Brussels as EU leaders gathered to hammer out a deal on the Union's multi-annual financial framework (MFF) from 2014 – 2020. While there, we met with An Taoiseach Enda Kenny to press home the need to get the agreement across the line as quickly as possible. While the deal eventually struck on February 8th did fall somewhat short of what we would have liked from an Irish farming point of view, it was as good as could have been hoped for, given strong opposition from certain other member states.

We were of course disappointed that the talks resulted in a cut to the overall ceilings for both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 – but there are positives, and I especially welcome the extra €100 million for Rural Development in Ireland negotiated by An Taoiseach in the closing stages of the meeting.

There is no escaping the fact that there is now less money available than we had under the 2007 – 2013 framework. We need the Government to deliver for famers - its commitment to agriculture and rural development will be truly tested by its approach to the co-funding issue.

ICSA has been working hard to develop workable proposals for the new CAP which truly support those farmers who need and deserve it most. We need to see targeted, decent increases for those active farmers who weren't dealt a fair hand in the last round, or who have increased production since the last reference year.

The onus is now on the Government to ensure that the agreement reached is used to get a deal on CAP reform under the Irish presidency and to ensure that Irish farmers benefit to the maximum extent possible within the confines of the MFF.

At this point, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to the late Minister of State Shane McEntee TD, whose death in December sent shockwaves through the farming and political communities.

Farmers wonder what the point of Quality Assurance is when there is no similar effort being made further down the food chain

ICSA beef chairman Edmond Phelan raised questions about the focus of the Bord Bia Quality Assurance Scheme, in an article which made front page headlines on the Farming Independent in January. Farmers have bought into this and submit for inspections every 18 months. They have been told the extra standards required are demanded by retailers and burger restaurants.

Some of the requirements are bizarre and detrimental to farmers' interests such as the rule that an animal bought at a mart is not eligible for BQAS unless it stays in the new herd for at least 70 days. The effect of this is to reduce competition for finished cattle and very forward stores. How significant it is to beef quality is debatable.

The key point is that farmers now wonder what the point is, when there is no similar effort being made further down the food chain.

Bord Bia need to review the scheme to ensure that the Irish beef sector is not undermined by all kinds of meat ending up in products such as burgers.

Bord Bia can point to the fact that consumers of ultra-cheap burgers tend not to be too concerned about quality assurance. Bord Bia is not in the business of awarding quality assurance labels to this kind of product, but the problem is that all products produced by the wider ABP group and indeed, the wider Irish industry have taken some reputational hit as a result of what happened at Silvercrest.

ICSA beef chair Edmond Phelan

Agreement on EU budget clears way for CAP reform under Irish Presidency

Eddie Punch
ICSA general secretary

Finally, an EU Budget (also called the MFF - Multi-annual Financial Framework) was agreed by EU prime ministers at a marathon summit meeting in Brussels on February 7th and 8th. The deal provides for spending commitments of €960 billion for all EU expenditure, including the CAP, structural and cohesion funds, research and administration, over the 7 year period 2014-2020.

The deal still requires the consent of the European Parliament and there are some influential MEPs who are not happy with the MFF because it represents a significant cut in expenditure compared with the last period. Even allowing for the mood of austerity, the initial EU Commission proposal was for a budget of €1045 billion. However, extreme hostility to this from countries such as the UK meant that amount was never going to be sanctioned and a deal collapsed in November because agreement could not be got on EU Council President Hermann von Rompuy's proposal of €973 billion.

ICSA was represented in Brussels for the talks by ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin and general secretary Eddie Punch who had a very useful meeting with Taoiseach Enda Kenny at an interval during the talks. ICSA also had discussions with senior officials from the Departments of the Taoiseach and Agriculture during the talks to make the case for maintaining the maximum support for farming.

The final deal means that Rural Development funding will be cut some 12% and Pillar 1 payments will be down over 3% but given the challenging economic circumstances, the outcome could have been worse. Ireland negotiated an extra €100 million over 7 years for Rural Development compared to what was on the table in November, but it is clear that there will be challenges in developing a new Rural Development programme that delivers in terms of schemes such as Disadvantaged Area Payment, Agri-Environment scheme, support for young farmers etc.

ICSA has made a submission on the Rural Development Programme which is available on the ICSA website. ICSA emphasises the need to support low income enterprises such as cattle and sheep, with support being channelled through a new suckler scheme, discussion groups, sheep schemes for lowland and upland farmers. ICSA also argues strongly for extra support for young farmers.

In terms of on-farm investment, ICSA is arguing for support under Rural Development for on-farm investment including an innovative proposal to support rotational grazing and roadways to assist better grassland management.

Reaction from Gabriel Gilmartin:

"While you never get the deal you want, it's as good as could be hoped for, given strong opposition from certain member states. The important thing is that this deal now clears the way for Minister Coveney to get a CAP reform agreed under the Irish presidency."

"We are of course disappointed that the talks have resulted in a cut to the overall ceilings for both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2. Pillar 2 funding will now average €313 million per annum for Ireland, compared to €356 million per annum average for 2007 – 2013."

"However, there are positives and I especially welcome the extra €100 million for Rural Development negotiated by An Taoiseach in the closing stages of today's talks. With a co-funding rate of 53%, this now suggests an annual Rural Development budget of €590 million, which is a significant drop compared to before, but it's not as bad as it might have been."

What we have secured in terms of CAP funding for Ireland

Pillar 1: €1.215 bn per annum
(New Single Payment System)

Pillar 2: €313 mn per annum
(To be matched by likely Exchequer funding of 47% for most schemes; although there are circumstances in which the co-funding by the state could be less. Total RD package will not exceed €590 mn/annum.)

(Covering Rural Development Programmes - DAS, Agri-environment, possibly a suckler scheme, discussion groups, possible sheep programmes, young farmer supports and farm development; possible LEADER - all for further negotiation)

Meanwhile the EU parliament agriculture committee took an important step forward by agreeing a set of amendments to the Commission text. Key points here are:

- No consensus on capping payments even at the relatively high level of €300,000 per farm proposed by the Commission.
- Acceptance that the French proposal for higher payments on the first 50 ha should be part of the negotiations
- Acceptance that the Irish idea on convergence should be part of the negotiations
- The 30% greening is still very much an integral part of the reform

It's important to note that the final EU parliament position will be determined by the full parliament in Strasbourg in plenary session.

However, all the signs are that the elements are falling into place to allow Simon Coveney to get agreement on CAP reform by June. This means that ideas, which are not part of the European Parliament position, or the EU Commission position or outlined by the EU Summit last week have no possibility of coming into play but it does mean that there is a lot of flexibility within the parameters of what's on the table.

News Briefs Compiled by Kathy McKenna

ICSA CALLS FOR REALISTIC SUPPORT SCHEME FOR SUCKLER INDUSTRY

Dermot Kelleher

The ICSA's suckler committee chairman, Dermot Kelleher, has criticised the Minister for Agriculture's decision to end the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme, fearing it will have a detrimental effect on the development of genetic data for the industry and will have repercussions for weanling welfare.

The €25 million Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme (SCWS) was replaced in the most recent Budget by a new Beef Data Programme (BDF). The payment per cow under the new programme is just half the €40 paid out last year under the SCWS – and is capped at a maximum of 20 cows, or €400.

"The end of the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme is a disaster. The Beef Data Programme which has been set up as a replacement is a mere shadow of what was a hugely beneficial scheme which was providing excellent value for money for the Government," Mr Kelleher said.

"Many top class suckler farmers will not take part in the Beef Data Programme because the increased risk of inspections and the paperwork involved is simply not worth the return they can expect under it. This will have huge consequences because the genetic data gathered during the lifetime of the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme has been of enormous benefit to the sector. I fear that a significant fall-off in the level of data being gathered will set the development of the suckler industry back by years."

"I very much hope that farmers will continue to send in their information, but to ensure this, the Minister needs to reverse the decision to end the SCWS, or alternatively to put a realistic payment in place. As it stands, a farmer with 40 suckler cows who was receiving €1,600 has been cut to €400."

Mr Kelleher added that there is also a worry about the welfare aspect of the suckler industry going forward. "There has also been a total withdrawal of support for weanling welfare. There is a danger now that less than ideal weaning methods could creep back in and ultimately that could damage the industry as a whole in terms of live exports."

"The solution to this is to reinstate the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme, or make decent provision for the suckler herd under a new scheme. The Minister and the Government must understand this." Mr Kelleher concluded.

CSO FARM INPUTS FIGURES UNDERLINE NEED TO ADDRESS RISING COSTS

Source: Central Statistics Office

ICSA president, Gabriel Gilmartin, says the latest statistics on agricultural prices released by the CSO underline the need to address the continued rise in farm input costs.

The preliminary estimates for the Agricultural Price Indices 2012 indicate an input price increase of 4.2% compared to 2011 costs - mainly due to increases in energy costs and feedstuffs (8.6% and 5.5% respectively).

Mr. Gilmartin said,"The most worrying thing about these figures is that outputs increased by 3.6% - which is clearly well behind the increase in production costs. It is also important to note that on many farms this winter, extra inputs such as feed were needed to make up for the effects of the bad weather last summer, such as a shortage of good quality silage."

"There are steps the Government can take to address the issue of steadily increasing input prices. For example, ICSA is calling for a suspension of the carbon tax, which is coming in at over 6 cent per litre on green diesel (or €20/tonne – up from €15/ tonne before May 1st, 2012) and seriously hinders the ability to produce at competitive prices."

SHEEP KILLS UNDERLINE NEED FOR COMPULSORY MICROCHIPPING OF DOGS

The ICSA has renewed its call for the introduction of compulsory microchipping for all dogs, in light of a number of extremely distressing dog attacks on sheep in several parts of the country.

ICSA sheep committee chairman Paul Brady said, "There has been a worrying number of horrific incidents recently of dogs killing and seriously injuring sheep, including pregnant ewes. Apart from the pain and stress inflicted on the animals, each one of these attacks represents serious distress and financial loss to the farmer involved and it is now beyond doubt that action is needed to address the problem of out-of-control dogs."

"ICSA has argued several times that the correct solution is to change the legislation, to allow for the introduction of compulsory microchipping of all dogs. This would also bring our law into line with the law in Northern Ireland, where all dogs must be microchipped. Microchipping is already used by most responsible dog owners for traceability purposes. It must be emphasised that this system would need to be backed up by a well-organised central database monitored by a State authority."

"ICSA sees this as the best solution to this highly emotive and distressing problem. We are confident that those who truly value their pets and working dogs will see this as a progressive initiative, designed to safeguard dogs and prevent distress, injury and death."

ICSA CALLS FOR NEW THINKING FROM GOVERNMENT ON BENEFITS OF ANAEROBIC DIGESTION

The Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association has called on the Government to get serious about the potential for Anaerobic Digestion to meet our targets for renewable energy while also helping to improve the viability and productive potential of Irish livestock farms.

According to ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin, this means that the Government must put in place a REFIT tariff that makes the process viable and also look at tax incentives to the construction of AD units.

"The Renewable Energy Feed-in Tariff (REFIT) in Ireland is 15c per kilowatt hour (kWh) which means

Gabriel Gilmartin

that AD is not a viable proposition but it is almost 30c/kWh in Northern Ireland. As a result, crops such as maize and fodder beet are being exported across the border to fuel Northern Ireland plants with a consequent loss of potential revenue here in the Republic."

:ICSA believes that there is an urgent need to put a realistic tariff in place to encourage AD. We also need tax incentives to encourage investment and in view of the difficulties of securing finance."

ICSA AGM & Annual Conference 2012: Where to now for Food Harvest 2020?

Gilmartin questions Government commitment to expansion targets

ICSA held its 2012 AGM and Annual Conference on Tuesday 11th of December, at the Alexander Hotel in Dublin. The event, which centred on the question, "Where now for Food Harvest 2020?" drew a large crowd to the city centre venue.

After the business of the AGM drew to a close, the Conference got underway, with an impressive line up of speakers taking to the floor after ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin's opening address, in which he challenged the Government's commitment to the targets of FH2020. Guest speaker Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine Simon Coveney TD was joined by Dr Alan Ahearne (NUIG economist and former special adviser to the late Minister Brian Lenihan TD) and Dr Thia Hennessy, Head of Agricultural Economics and Farm Surveys at Teagasc.

In his address, Mr Gilmartin reflected on the disastrous farming year that was 2012 and said the lessons had to be learned if we are to move forward with the ambitious programme for expansion. Securing new markets for Irish beef must be a top priority, with Mr Gilmartin focussing on the potential behind the Russian and Chinese markets in particular. He said live exports must also be a priority in the drive for increased output value.

Gabriel Gilmartin delivering the President's Address at the 2012 ICSA AGM & Annual Conference

Mr Gilmartin expressed his disappointment with a number of the measures that had been announced in the previous week's Budget in relation to agriculture, singling out the decision to end the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme for sharp criticism as a "short-sighted approach at best," which was at odds with Minister Coveney's declaration of support for the suckler herd at ICSA's 2011 conference.

Progress on the CAP was of course, a major feature of the president's address. Mr Gilmartin urged the Minister to forge ahead with strategic alliances with similar-minded members states during the negotiations, in order to face down aggressive opposition on key issues such as capping, and to do all in his power to ensure the deal is secured during Ireland's presidency. He reiterated the passionately-held belief of ICSA that the Single Farm Payment must be targeted at those active farmers who deserve it the most.

Minister Coveney highlighted the 'strait-jacket' on expenditure imposed on his Department and all Departments as a result of the bail-out position Ireland is in at the moment. Under the circumstances, he said he would defend all of the measures contained in Budget 2013 – but that did not mean that it wasn't a difficult Budget to construct. Addressing Gabriel Gilmartin's criticism of the end of the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme, Minister Coveney pointed to the fact that the scheme had always been due to end this year and said opening a new, similar scheme would not have been approved by the Department of Finance. He added that the replacement Beef Data Transfer programme was a way of prioritising small farmers in straitened financial circumstances.

On CAP, the Minister assured the delegates that he was confident that a CAP deal can indeed be agreed upon by June.

In an interesting speech given recent developments, Dr Alan Ahearne warned that getting a deal on the promissory notes, while positive, would not be a panacea to the country's economic woes. He outlined that the main problem with the economy is a continued contraction in the domestic economy and in particular, in consumer spending, accompanied by a lower than expected rate of growth in exports at 3%. Dr Ahearne added that the Euro area economy was the "sick man" of the global economy, which is contributing greatly to Ireland's financial position.

The final speaker of the night, Dr Thia Hennessy, took a look back on 2012 in terms of prices, costs yields and incomes, and then presented the delegates with Teagasc's outlook for Irish farming in 2013. Dr Hennessy outlined that as a whole, initial indications are that the average income was down about 12% in 2012 to an average of about €21,500 across all sectors. Looking ahead, she outlined some drop in income can be expected on cattle and sheep farms as a result of the loss of the SCWS and the Sheep Grassland Scheme; while both cattle and sheep prices can be expected to remain stable. On feed prices, Dr Hennessy said she expects feed prices will go up, but that will be offset by lower feed requirements leading to an overall fall in expenditure on feed.

Finally, a collection proposed by Albert Thompson in aid of St Vincent de Paul was held during the AGM. €750 raised on the day was matched by the National Office and a cheque was presented to St. Vincent de Paul at Christmas. A big thank you to Albert for proposing the idea, and of course to everyone who so generously contributed to the collection on the day.

Minister Simon Coveney taking questions from the floor at ICSA's AGM & Annual Conference in December 2012

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin

Minister for Agriculture Simon Coveney

Teagasc's Head of Agricultural Economics and Farm Surveys, Thia Hennessy

NUIG economist Alan Ahearne

Ore-Lyte – A One Day Stabilisation Treatment for Calves

Ark Animal Care has launched Ore-Lyte, a very exciting and cost effective treatment for calves to be given when the first signs of diarrhoea are identified. Ore-Lyte works by helping to stabilise the water and electrolyte balance and encourage optimal gut health. It is presented in an easy to administer capsule with applicator in each pack. The unique one day regime, offers a whole range of benefits for the animal and for the farmer. Being a one day treatment with no change to normal feeding regime means the calf will be up and about much quicker and starting to thrive much earlier than with other treatments – which adds up to less time on the farmer's part consumed with treating sick calves, an earlier return to animal growth and reduced costs.

Ore-Lyte is administered in capsule form using an applicator with a minimum of fuss and a guarantee of a full dosage delivery ingested by the calf. Each capsule contains highly concentrated extracts from oregano plants, a traditional herb that has proven rehabilitation benefits proven over thousands of years, but now optimised in the Ore-Lyte formula. A recent study, in a control group, showed that 58% of animals were free of the symptoms of diarrhoea after just one capsule. The rest of the animals were clear of symptoms after the second capsule administered 6 to 8 hours after first application. A remarkable achievement, particularly when the normal current treatment regime can take up to 5 days, an enormous amount of time and at a considerably higher expense.

The natural ingredients in Ore-Lyte means that no prescriptions are required, the capsule means that there is no need for time consuming measuring and diluting and the applicator guarantees full treatment delivery – it all adds up to a healthy calf!

Ark Animal Care – understanding the modern farmers needs

Ark Animal Care has spent almost 2 decades developing and distributing products in Ireland which benefit livestock farmers across the board. Well known for products such as Calf Saver, Colostart and an extensive range of pig products, Ark Animal Care feels that Ore-Lyte will bring enormous advantages to Irish farmers in the treatment of calves – and to celebrate the launch of Ore-Lyte, Ark are giving away a 3-Capsule-Pack FREE to the early purchasers of the Ore-Lyte 10 Capsule Pack. Details of how to take up this offer are in the tube.

First Electrolyte Paste in the world, launched in Ireland - StartAid Extra Paste

by Mervue Laboratories

Following extensive research, Mervue Laboratories have developed the fastest acting electrolyte in the world. It has a triple action mode of action to deal with nutritional diarrhoea fast and boost immediate calf recovery. Start Aid Extra is a paste uniquely formulated to rehydrate the calf, support calf metabolism and repair the gut function.

Nutritional Diarrhoea is a common problem on many farms. Even mild diarrhoea can cause life threatening dehydration, depression, cramp, effects appetite and reduces the ability of the calf to regulate its temperature. This puts significant stress on the calf and renders it more susceptible to other diseases and infections. The key to dealing with nutritional diarrhoea is to get in as early as possible. From a practical point of view this is often difficult as calves may be just fed or if sucking it may be difficult to get the calf to drink from a teat. The calf is typically left until the next feed to be treated.

StartAid Extra is packed in a 60ml paste "ready to dose" syringe. This allows it to be conveniently stored in the calf house and ready to feed at the very first signs of diarrhoea. Frequently many calves have diarrhoea for 24-48 hours before an electrolyte is fed. This increases stress on the calf, slows down recovery, reduces growth rate and increases the risk of infection.

Administer StartAid Extra paste at the first signs of diarrhoea and repeat if necessary. The calf must have access to water. The product is not suitable for calves which are severely dehydrated AND NOT DRINKING. StartAid Extra is pH balanced so you can continue to feed milk or milkreplacer. Milk provides essential nutrients which will help the recovery of the calf. The old theory of taking the calf off milk has being comprehensively proved to cause more problems and in effect starve the calf of vital food and energy at a critical time. In practical terms one has to think, when has a baby ever being starved of milk when diarrhoea is present.

StartAid Extra paste is now available in Ireland for the first time from your Local Merchant and Co op.

Sheep Technology Adoption Programme gets underway


ICSA sheep chair Paul Brady

ICSA sheep chair, Paul Brady has welcomed the commencement of the new Sheep Technology Adoption Programme (STAP). The programme was launched in January 2013 by the Minister for Agriculture, and is designed to increase profitability by promoting best practice in the management of sheep farms.

Participation in the programme is subject to certain criteria, including membership of the Bord Bia Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme. It is expected that the STAP will run for three years, with the Minister stating that he has made €3 million available for the programme for this year. That figure is based on an expected uptake by 3,000 farmers, with the target of a maximum payment of €1,000 per participant.

It is hoped that the success of the Beef Technology Adoption Programme will follow through to the sheep sector through the new scheme. Five key areas of production will form the focus of the tasks and discussion group meetings as part of the programme. These are: financial management, grassland management, flock health, animal breeding and welfare, and production of animals to meet market requirements.

Mr Brady said, "It is very heartening to see sheep farmers being able to avail of the opportunities cattle farmers have enjoyed under the BTAP scheme. Any project aimed at improving production and increasing profitability will certainly be welcomed by sheep farmers."

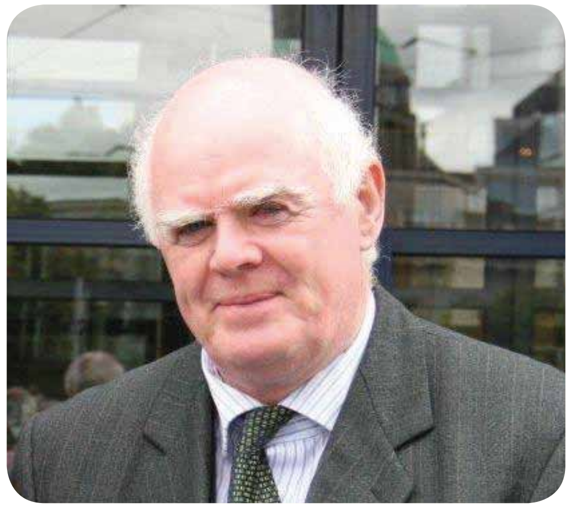
Farm Safety: No Simple Solution

By Geoff Hamilton

In January, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Richard Bruton TD launched a new Three Year Strategy for the Health and Safety Authority. The ultimate aim of the new strategy is to continue to reduce accidents and ill-health in the workplace. Figures from the Authority show that there has been a downward trend in the fatal injury rate since 2003. A key theme for 2013 will be to address the relatively high fatality rate in the Agriculture sector, which has remained static since 2010.

ICSA have been strong advocates for farm safety promotion, and will continue to endorse the importance of farm safety in 2013, in light of the most recent statistics released by the Health and Safety Authority which show that 21 people lost their lives in farming-related accidents during 2012. Connaught/Ulster vice president John Flynn said the HSA figures were a tragic reminder to farmers to prioritise farm safety. The figures indicate that approximately half of all deaths in the agriculture sector are caused by tractors, machinery and vehicles, while other common causes include livestock, the collapse of buildings, falling objects, drowning, and falls.

Mr Flynn highlighted the fact that the nature of farm work and the structure of the farming population means that comparisons with non-farming activities are of little value in accessing how far the Irish farming industry has progressed in terms of implementing safer working practices. "No matter what we do, a farm will always be a more challenging environment than an office in terms of hazard," he said. ICSA are exploring the option of pushing for rural development funds to provide support for the installation of better calving and handling facilities on farm.


John Flynn, ICSA Connaught/Ulster vice president

A substantial proportion of farm accidents involve older people. In those cases, reduced physical strength and mobility could be a contributory factor in accidents occurring, as opposed to unsafe work practices. Department of Agriculture figures now show that almost 30% of Single Farm Payment recipients are aged 65 or older, while only 5% are aged 35 or under. Mr Flynn noted that the farm safety challenge is "all the more difficult because of the age structure."

ICSA are very much aware that many older farmers find that working on farms keeps them interested in life, and much fitter than if they simply stayed at home or retired to a nursing home. The optimal solution is to strive towards establishing a younger farming population which would effectively reduce the work pressure on older farmers. However, there are no quick or simple solutions to this problem which much be addressed through integrated policy and farm supports. ICSA will continue to lobby on behalf of its members for such developments at local, national and EU level.

Guidelines on the Preparation of a Safety Statement for a Farm are available on the HSA website, www.hsa.ie.

Gilmartin: Minister must reassess scale of proposed changes to commonage rules

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin used the platform of the Association's Annual Conference in December to push for a complete re-think of the proposed new rules for commonages.

Last November, the Minister for Agriculture announced that he had decided to postpone distributing letters to commonage shareholders, a decision which was welcomed by ICSA. Mr Gilmartin had argued that the sending of the letters – outlining the minimum and maximum number of sheep for the entire land parcel, as well as for each shareholder - would have led to huge confusion. "Since these changes were first mooted, ICSA believed that the way in which the rules were being rolled out was very unsatisfactory. At the very least, a lengthy lead-in period is needed for change of this scale. I am glad the Minister took heed of the concerns we raised with regards to the proposals and that a longer time frame is being given to implementing the changes."

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin pressed the issue of proposed new rules for commonages with the Minister for Agriculture at ICSA's recent AGM/Annual Conference

The issue is of particular concern in the West of Ireland along with counties Wicklow and Cork, which have the lion's share of commonage land, and has been raised by concerned farmers at many public meetings.

Mr Gilmartin emphasised to the Minister that the main sticking point under the proposals is the idea of collective agreement. The proposals call on all farmers with shares in the commonage – be they active, inactive, or dormant – to come together to agree on how to meet the stocking levels required. ICSA sees this as potentially hugely difficult, if not impossible in many cases.

"On some commonages all shareholders are active and work well with each other, and in these cases agreement may be possible. However, the fact is that in a good number of cases strained relations will make agreement impossible. There is also the strong possibility that shareholders who previously got on well will fall out over the detail of the proposals. My fear is that active farmers will suffer when inactive and dormant shareholders decide to come back and stock up as a result of the new rules," Mr Gilmartin explained.

It is hoped that the Minister is now reviewing the original collective agreement proposal with a view to coming up with a more practical, workable solution to meet the requirements of the EU's Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) framework.

"The potential for an individual farmer who complies with whatever agreement is reached to be penalised if one of his fellow shareholders fails to comply with the regulations is very concerning. Non-compliance on the stocking levels can lead to penalties being applied to the Single Farm Payments and Disadvantaged Area Payments – this could be disastrous. It's just not appropriate or acceptable to effectively make one farmer accountable for the action or inaction of another."

"This is another example of farming bureaucracy paying no heed to farming reality." Mr Gilmartin has sought a guarantee from the Minister that these troubling aspects of the proposed new rules will be seriously reconsidered before any new commonage regime is implemented.

Revised TB scheme changes "a victory for common sense"

The decision by the Department of Agriculture to row back on a number of controversial cost-saving proposals was welcomed by ICSA last December.

The original changes were presented to ICSA and other farm organisations in October of last year, after which ICSA Rural Development chairman John Barron said that he was very willing to engage with the Department on worthwhile cost reduction, as he always felt there was an element of wastage inherent in the scheme.

However, Mr Barron said that while he is happy to see effort being made to use the limited resources as efficiently as possible, he had serious concerns about some of the proposals put forward at the time. "The proposal to abolish independent evaluations of infected cattle in cases where there is only one reactor was simply unacceptable. Independent evaluation of all reactors is a core principle of the TB eradication scheme which farmers fought hard to secure. There was simply no way ICSA was going to accept its removal. We mounted a very robust challenge to the proposal and I regard it as a victory for common sense that our position was vindicated and it was dropped from the scheme."

ICSA also strongly opposed the suggestion that farmers would face a new, additional charge of €22.50 per head for the collection of reactors, which the Department said was equivalent to half the cost to them to transport the animals. "The idea that the Department pays €45 a head is ludicrous in the first place. We suggested that in the first instance, they should renegotiate their deal with the hauliers in order to save on transport costs. To implement that charge would have been unfair and disproportionate to say the least, and I am delighted that the Minister listened to ICSA on this."

ICSA Rural Development chair John Barron: Department row-back on TB scheme changes "a victory for common sense"

Mr Barron said the meeting in October left him questioning whether some of the measures being put forward were simply a way of getting farmers to shoulder the cost of the likes of the four-month testing arrangement in the case of contiguous breakdowns – something ICSA was not going to stand by and accept.

60 day brucellosis testing no longer justified

ICSA Rural Development chairman, John Barron believes there is a need for a review of 60-day brucellosis testing. He pointed out that the Republic is now officially brucellosis free (OBF).

"The 60-day limit is too restrictive and it acts as a barrier to trading cull cows and heifers in the mart. Some farmers end up selling unfit cows to factories when they would do much better in marts."

"We do have to continue to be careful, but I see no reason why the 60-day period couldn't be doubled in the short-term and of course, in the long run brucellosis blood testing will hopefully be abolished. Milk testing should be the main method of ongoing monitoring of OBF status."

ICSA delegation in Brussels for COMAGRI vote

ICSA president Gabriel Gilmartin and honorary secretary John Cleary with Jim Higgins MEP and Liam Aylward MEP in Brussels during the COMAGRI vote in the European Parliament Agriculture Committee on January 23rd/24th

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