



Minister Simon Coveney pictured at the ICSA AGM and Annual Conference 2016 with (L-R) John Halley (Munster Vice President), Edmond Phelan (National Beef Chairman), Patrick Kent (ICSA National President), John Brooks (National Sheep Chairman), Seamus Sherlock (National Rural Development Chairman), Jimmy Cosgrave Jnr. (Leinster Vice President) & Dermot Kelleher (National Suckler Chairman)

## Storm clouds gathering around beef trade for 2016

**Eddie Punch**  
General Secretary

Cattle farmers will be looking apprehensively at the livestock trade as we face into 2016. Beef price stayed sluggish at the end of 2015 and with the figures suggesting that cattle will get more plentiful towards late 2016, there are grounds for concern.

January has also seen sterling weaken against the euro. Whereas 72p sterling bought €1 for a lot of 2015, exchange rate movements now mean that a euro costs 77p sterling. This is reflected by a narrowing of the price differential for an R grade steer from over a euro in late 2015 to less than 70c in the third week of January.

Perhaps the more contentious issue will be the renewed focus on weight limits. Factories have begun to slash prices for over 420kg prime cattle, although some reports suggest that if you shop around cattle up to 450kg can get away without the hit.

ICSA has consistently opposed these weight limits. Suckling based on continental cattle cannot survive on weight limits of 420kg, regardless of whether we are talking steers or bulls. Of course, if the price was right farmers will adapt to anything but a limit of 420kg at a price of €3.90 simply does not leave enough margin to cover a weanling at €1,000.

ICSA has been lobbying for much closer regulation of the whole

**ICSA Action:** ICSA will continue to lobby at EU Commission level for an EU regulator to audit who gets what from the Food Chain. ICSA will be fighting for an appeals process for farmers unhappy with grades and the right to have grading machine images re-examined by a third party, as well as permanent Department supervision in meat plants to cover grades, trim, angle of neck cut etc.

beef chain. At the 2014 ploughing, ICSA launched campaigns against weight limits, age limits and residency requirements. ICSA also launched the time for a regulator campaign.

Since then, the association has developed this into a campaign for an EU regulator of the food chain to audit who is getting what from key farm products such as beef, lamb, cereals and dairy. ICSA president

Patrick Kent led a delegation to meet Commissioner Phil Hogan to insist that the EU Commission should put the squeeze on retailers or processors who are grabbing more and more of the profit out of the beef animal. The ICSA proposal is that an EU regulator should have the power to audit the food chain for products like beef and publish who gets what from the sale of beef.

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# Storm clouds gathering around beef trade for 2016

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This could then form the basis for determining if price gouging was happening.

The problem at the moment is that no one can definitively tell how much farmers are being ripped off in the absence of transparency around processor and retailer margins. However, when you see liquid milk being bought from farmers for less than 30c and sold for more than a euro, you get a fair idea. Beef is more complex because a carcass of 400kg might not yield much more than 280kg of saleable beef and of course, there is a wide disparity between high value steak cuts and lower grade mince prices.

Nowadays, the beef chain is further complicated by the value of the fifth quarter with considerable speculation around the value to be harvested for energy and cosmetic products, as well as the traditional trade for offal and hides.

ICSA was therefore pleased to see that the IFA and Ulster Farmers' Union have now conceded that ICSA has been right all along in calling for independent regulation at the highest level. In the past few weeks, IFA have called for a policeman for the beef sector and the UFU have called for an EU supermarket ombudsman.

ICSA beef chairman Edmond Phelan has welcomed this support:

"It is recognition of ICSA's campaign for transparency along the food chain and in meat factories. This campaign started at the 2014 ploughing championships and is widely supported by farmers. The food chain is not working for beef and sheep farmers. We have seen over-regulation of farmers but hardly any regulation further down the chain.

We are also insisting that, at national level, there must be permanent scrutiny of meat plants to monitor issues such as carcass trim, angle of neck cut and an appeals process where farmers are unhappy with grades and fat scores."

All of the issues around the beef sector have been debated vigorously at the beef forum but there is a growing disenchantment with the process. The intervention of the competition authority to prevent any possible meaningful debate around price last year leaves a bitter taste, and it remains to be seen whether the same body will prove its mettle regarding the proposed take-over of Slaney by the ABP group.

# Special Sweetheart deal for Dairy farmers

ICSA has vehemently opposed the used of state funds exclusively for dairy farmers. At the ploughing, we lobbied for support for all farmers rather than a special sweetheart deal for dairy farmers.

Cattle and sheep farmers are manifestly worse off than their dairy counterparts. In 2014, according to the Teagasc National Farm Survey, dairy incomes averaged over €68,000 compared to cattle and sheep farm incomes ranging from €10,000 to €14,000.

In 2015, their estimate is that dairy incomes will drop to €48,000. Even though there were marginal increases in the drystock enterprises, the average income for cattle and sheep farmers in 2015 still comes nowhere near €20,000.

ICSA president Patrick Kent again chastised the Minister at the recent ICSA AGM and Annual Conference for the decision. "The next time we see a drop in beef or sheep prices, the precedent has been set that special packages can be negotiated. It is beyond belief that decision makers could come up with a package for dairying on the back of a price fall but nothing was done for beef farmers in 2014."

**ICSA Action:** ICSA is demanding that cattle and sheep farmers get a package like dairy farmers next time price falls.

# Bord Bia Quality Assurance Scheme must be fair for farmers

ICSA beef chairman Edmond Phelan is calling for a fair appeals process for farmers regarding the quality assurance scheme. "ICSA is opposing the unacceptable situation where farmers can be thrown out of the scheme overnight on the back of very technical shortcomings in a Bord Bia audit. We have increasing reports of top quality farmers with a long track record of producing beef and lamb and who have been in QA schemes for years unexpectedly failing audits in recent months."

ICSA believes that it is unacceptable that a farmer's livelihood can be undermined overnight and the association

is critical of reports of extremely hostile audits experienced by some farmers. "Farmers co-operation with the Quality Assurance Scheme has helped meat factories and retailers with their marketing efforts but farmers are seeing very little benefits, but a lot of cuts. As a minimum, as in any other industry, a farmer who volunteers to participate in a scheme which benefits others further down the food chain should be entitled a grace period of two months to make any changes necessary followed by an automatic right to re-audit by a different auditor. In the interim, the farmer should be entitled to remain in the scheme, as a quality assured farmer.

**ICSA Action:** ICSA will be pressurising Bord Bia to allow farmers automatic right of appeal, and the guarantee that no farmer will be excluded from the QA scheme until they have been re-audited, by a different auditor if the farmer wishes.

## ICSA Special Sale Event at Carrigallen Mart



ICSA Cavan chairman Hugh Farrell has been running a series of special sales events at Carrigallen Mart. On Monday February 1st, the sales saw the top price paid for a 4 star Limousin in calf heifer, which made €1,850.00. Hugh, with the help of fellow Cavan National Executive member Philip Maguire, will be running more of these very successful events in the coming months. These events are booked for the first Monday in March, April and May. Hugh would like to say a big thank to Carrigallen Mart manager, Helen Kells and all the staff for their help. He would also like to thank ICSA National Executive members for their continued support. For more information, you can call Hugh on 086 1504390 or Carrigallen Mart on 049 433 9633.

## President's Address

**Patrick Kent**  
President ICSA

Hello and you're very welcome to the spring 2016 edition of Drystock Farmer. Fresh from our hugely successful AGM, 2016 sees ICSA well positioned to seek a better deal for farmers to achieve a greater share of profits from the food chain. In this regard we are delighted to have welcomed many new and enthusiastic members to our National Executive.

The ICSA has launched its pre-election manifesto, which you can read in full on page 15. The manifesto outlines the association's priorities for any incoming Government. Over the next few weeks ICSA National Executive members in every county will be meeting the candidates in their constituency to discuss in detail what we believe are vital changes that need to be made to ensure the viability of family farms in this country.



ICSA is campaigning for a proper regulatory environment and public support scheme that is available to ALL farmers' not just dairy farmers. We are however opposed to supports, such as an EU wide coupled ewe payment which would only result in driving prices down. ICSA firmly believes that we must only produce that which there is a market for in order to walk the fine line between supply and demand.

We will be continuing to lobby for a meat regulator with powers to examine exactly who gets what from our produce. The need for transparency at processor and retailer level is now critical. ICSA will also continue to fight for live exports to be given the same diplomatic push as meat exports and to once and for all solve the labelling blockage of live exports to Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

# IRISH LIMOUSIN LOOKING FORWARD TO 2016

## 2016 SALES

| SALE VENUE                    | 2016 SALE DATE |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Roscrea Premier Bull          | 27th February  |
| Tullamore (Males & Females)   | 19th March     |
| Athenry (Males & Females)     | 14th April     |
| Roscrea Premier Male & Female | 16th May       |
| Roscommon (Males & Females)   | 21st May       |
| ILC Elite Sale                | 27th August    |
| Roscrea Premier Male & Female | 31st October   |
| Tullow (Males & Females)      | 16th November  |



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# Full attendance at ICSA AGM and Annual Conference to hear Minister Coveney respond over marathon two hour session

**Eamon O’Cuív and Andrew Doyle also involved in detailed debate as ICSA President outlines key concerns and launches ICSA pre-election Manifesto**

**O**ver a hundred people attended the ICSA AGM and Annual Conference held on January 28<sup>th</sup> in the Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise. It was generally agreed that this was one of the most successful and lively annual meetings in a long time with a substantial input from Minister Coveney, who spoke and answered questions for over two solid hours. This was followed by impressive performances from Fianna Fáil’s Eamon O’Cuív and Andrew Doyle, FG who is also chairman of the Oireachtas Agricultural Affairs Committee.

ICSA president Patrick Kent, addressing the conference theme “Setting the Agenda for the next Government”, launched the ICSA pre-election manifesto in his speech (see page 15) and made a very strong case to the Minister that the cattle and sheep sectors were not going well. He acknowledged that tax changes made in the last budget were going in the right direction (a new tax credit for self – employed, increased capital acquisitions tax thresholds) and he urged that the next government should bring the self-employed tax credit up to the same level as the PAYE employee credit. He also called for the phasing out of the USC which is particularly unfair on progressive farmers developing their farms.

Regarding the ICSA manifesto, Mr Kent outlined the four pillars as:

- Provide a regulatory environment and a public support regime that’s fair to all farmers.
- A clear focus on producing only what there are viable markets for.
- Do everything possible to get a fair share of profits for farmers.
- Put live exports top of the agenda.

The ICSA president was very strong on insisting that more needs to be done to get farmers a fair share of the final retail price and he was adamant that the government must prioritise growing the live export trade, mentioning places such as Egypt. He also called for action to counteract UK supermarkets who are frustrating live exports to Britain and Northern Ireland allegedly because of EU labelling laws. ICSA is demanding that the Single European Market must be as effective for small family farms as it is for big business.

Patrick Kent also hit out at delays in payments from Department schemes and he called for a re-organisation of resources to ensure that all farmers are paid on time for all schemes.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Defence, Simon Coveney said that he had set out to counter the negative perception of agriculture and he felt that record numbers in ag colleges demonstrated success in this approach.

He argued that progress was being made in getting more markets for agricultural products. He admitted that trade deals such as TTIP and



**ICSA’s Eddie Punch, Patrick Kent and James Reynolds pictured with Minister Simon Coveney at ICSA AGM and Annual Conference 2016**

Mercosur in particular posed a risk for the beef sector.

Regarding the ABP / Slaney deal, he would only say that he wanted the Competition Authority to do their job.

On the Rural Development Programme, he argued that some of the proposals from other parties regarding schemes did not add up financially but he said he had an open mind on a sheep scheme, when pressed by ICSA sheep chairman John Brooks.

Minister Coveney accepted that there were problems with payment delays. He promised that next year, every effort would be made to improve delivery. He did point out that 2015 saw the implementation of a whole new BPS scheme and new RD programmes, as well as national reserve and young farmer top-ups. “While we will make every effort to be more efficient, there is no other country in Europe with a better record of delivering payments on time.”

Eamon O’Cuív of Fianna Fáil outlined his party’s

agricultural manifesto. He argued very strongly that we were heading for a big underspend of the Rural Development Programme budget over its lifetime (2014-2020). He estimated that without substantial amendment, the underspend could be as high as €300 million. Therefore, he argued, there was considerable scope to look at ideas like €200/cow on the suckler scheme, €20/ewe or a full reversal of cuts to the disadvantaged areas (ANC scheme).

O’Cuív also outlined his policy in terms of getting farmers a fair share for their produce and he said that the Oireachtas Agricultural Committee had worked well across party lines in bringing this issue to Europe.

Andrew Doyle pointed out that Minister Bruton was bringing in Retail Groceries legislation which he believed would tighten up on abuse of suppliers by supermarkets. He also referred to changes being proposed by Commissioner Phil Hogan which would reduce overclaim penalties.



Donie Kelleher from Cork with Austin Stevenson, William McGirr and Robin Craig all from Donegal pictured at ICSA's Annual Conference



Andrew Doyle TD (FG), ICSA President Patrick Kent and Eamon O'Cuiv TD (FF)

**COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR:**

**Alison DeVere Hunt - Tipperary**

"The land rental market is out of control and makes no sense. The residency rules being imposed by factories are undermining the mart trade and the Department is ignoring what is going on."

**Tom Stephenson - Wicklow**

"Why are we paying €80/ tonne more for fertiliser than our colleagues in France, Italy and Germany. We are being ripped off on fertiliser at a time when collapsing energy costs suggest we should be making big savings."

**Austin Stevenson - Donegal**

"We need to cut the amount of land used for beef by 5% to try and get balance into beef markets. It might help with climate change too but the main point is that we are wasting our time at beef producing more than the market can take."

**Jimmy Cosgrave - Meath**

"There might be 8,000 attending agricultural college but the real question is how many of them will still be farming in 10 year's time."

**Seamus Sherlock - Limerick**

"Rural broadband is a disgrace. We need a full scheme for hen harrier farmers and we need it now."



Delegates at a packed ICSA AGM and Annual Conference



ICSA Connacht/Ulster Vice President Paul Brady pictured with ICSA President Patrick Kent



ICSA Sheep Chairman John Brooks pictured with Galway Chairman Pat Loughnane



John Halley (ICSA Munster Vice President) questions Minister Simon Coveney

## News Briefs

### ICSA OPPOSES UNACCEPTABLE LEVIES

ICSA policy has always taken a strong stance against collecting levies from farmers for earnings they are due. It is our belief that as a farming organisation we are here to get the best possible deal for each of our members whether it is in your local mart or at EU level. To us in ICSA, this means that all farmers should collect every cent they are due for the labour they have put in.

After hearing from a significant number of farmers that they were in fact unaware that these levies were being taken without their explicit permission, ICSA felt it was our duty to our members to write to the various marts and factories around the country to ask their position on the levy situation.

Aside from the questionable legality of taking money without the farmers written or oral consent, ICSA felt that as a representative body we have a duty to protect the financial interests of our members and therefore will be seeking all cattle trading bodies to work on an opt in/opt out basis from this point forth. We are all well aware how challenging it can be for farmers to be paid fairly for their produce

so the idea that this money is being taken without knowledge or consent is infuriating.

ICSA can promise our members that we will be doing everything in our power to have the un-compulsory levy system a choice that each farmer will either consent to or not, without their earnings being touched beforehand.

### ICSA WELCOMES INCREASE IN TB VALUATION MAXIMUM FOR PEDIGREE BULLS

ICSA TB committee chairman John Barron has welcomed news that the maximum valuation for a pedigree bull under the TB market valuation scheme has been increased from €3,500 to €5,000 following ICSA lobbying on the issue.

"ICSA argued that the previous maximum of €3,500 did not reflect the reality in the marketplace for suckler farmers in particular who wish to run the best possible bull with the most desirable genetics with their herd. It is commonplace, albeit still a minority, for suckler farmers to pay €4-5,000 for a high calibre bull. This is particularly important in the suckler sector where

AI use is limited by a variety of factors, such as difficulties with heat detection, herds grazing away from the farmyard on different parcels and also the prevalence of part-time farming due to income issues."

"This change will have a minimal impact on the Department's TB budget because the incidence of TB among pedigree bulls is tiny but, for the unfortunate individual farmer who has a reactor pedigree bull, it will make a significant difference. It will give a boost to the pedigree sector as well as it provides a measure of confidence and security around higher value bulls. Given the increased focus on star ratings under the BDGP, we have to be seen to have valuations which reflect the reality in the marketplace."

The issue around farmers not being permitted to buy in livestock where there is a TB outbreak continues to be a sore point. There is some flexibility around feedlot status where a farmer can, where facilities are appropriate, seek a second herd number but the terms and conditions around this are not straightforward. "For some farmers, the prohibition on buying in stock until one clear test is achieved is potentially devastating to their farming model. We will continue to negotiate with the Department for workable solutions on this contentious issue."

# CHAROLAIS SPRING SALES

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**ATHENRY – 7<sup>TH</sup> APRIL**

**TULLAMORE – 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL**

**TULLAMORE – 21<sup>ST</sup> MAY**

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# ICSA brings concerns over ABP Slaney merger to the Competition Commission and to Europe

**ICSA lodged a complaint to the Competition & Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC - formerly Competition Authority) before Christmas outlining concerns about the proposed merger of ABP and Slaney.**

ICSA is insisting that the CCPC delays issuing clearance to the reported merger between ABP and the Slaney Foods Group until a full examination of the following aspects of the merger is concluded and published. ICSA also believes that all interested parties, including farmer representative associations should be consulted at every stage of this process.

- To what extent competition for cattle will be hindered by the reduction in independent outlets competing for cattle with the big two of ABP and Dawn?
- To what extent does the acquisition reduce competition in the rendering trade, given that there will now effectively be only four category three outlets for handling fifth quarter products?
- To what extent will the acquisition undermine competition for niche Hereford and Angus beef given that Slaney was a main competitor to ABP for these important added value markets which are particularly important for key supermarket contracts?

- Is the CCPC concerned at the fact that a dominant player in the beef industry in Ireland and the UK is now in control of 40% of sheepmeat processing (via Irish Country Meats, part of the Slaney Foods Group) in Ireland as well?
- To what extent is competition for cattle impacted in Northern Ireland where the Linden Food Group (currently the owner of 50% of the Slaney Foods Group) was an important independent processor but which will now be under the influence of the ABP merger and will the CCPC examine what impact this will have on the cattle trade in the Republic?

ICSA beef chairman Edmond Phelan said that there was huge alarm among cattle and sheep farmers that this deal will be disastrous for them. "Farmers are very worried that this merger will be used to drive prices even lower. Many farmers believe that the cattle trade is operated almost like a cartel as there seems to be little difference in prices or in specifications. Most farmers associate the difficulties in getting better prices with the dominance of the ABP, Dawn and Kepak groups. This merger further consolidates the cattle trade in a small circle which leaves the farmer in an extremely vulnerable position."



**ICSA National Beef Chairman Edmond Phelan delivers a letter to Competition Commission over concerns about ABP / Slaney merger in December**

ICSA is also pursuing this with the competition section of the EU Commission and welcomes the initiative shown by MEPs such as Mairéad McGuinness who recently met the EU Competition Commissioner and Matt Carthy who has also been vocal on the issue.

**ICSA Action:** ICSA will pursue the CCPC on the back of the letter of complaint already lodged regarding the ABP/ Slaney merger and is also lodging a complaint at EU Commission level.

## ICSA newly elected officers

### Edmond Phelan - ICSA National Beef Chairman



Edmond Phelan is beginning his third term as ICSA National Beef Chairman.

Edmond from Caher, Fenor, Co. Waterford has gained vast experience over his previous terms and looks forward to tackling some critical issues in this, his final term. Top of Edmond's agenda is delivering more transparency down the food chain, demanding for a regulator to see who is making what from farmers produce.

### Seamus Sherlock – Rural Development Chairman



After serving a full term as Rural Development vice chairman, Seamus Sherlock

has now become Rural Development chairman, succeeding Kildare's Billy Gray. Seamus is a drystock farmer living in Feohanagh in Co. Limerick. When asked about his top priority in the role he said, "Putting money in to drystock farmers' pockets to keep them going".

### Denis Nolan – Honorary Secretary



Carlow chairman, sheep farmer Denis Nolan from Agha, Nurney in County Carlow

has been elected as ICSA Honorary Secretary. Denis follows in the footsteps of James Reynolds in this role. His priority is to secure more support for sheep farmers in the rural development programme.

### James Reynolds – ICSA National Treasurer



James Reynolds was elected ICSA National Treasurer at our recent AGM.

Formerly, ICSA Honorary Secretary, James will take up the mantle from Donegal man, and former ICSA president Malcolm Thompson. James from Loughill, Coolarty, Edgeworthstown in Co. Longford is a suckler and sheep farmer, farming 112 acres.

## ICSA PROPOSES A SHEEP SCHEME AS PART OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

2016 has started well for sheep farmers. ICSA sheep chairman John Brooks has described recent trade as "rocksolid". Spring lamb is securing €5.85/kg in many places and the factory price for ewes has lifted by 30c to between €3.00 and €3.30/kg.

Buoyant markets must not lead to complacency though, market conditions remain tough and ICSA believes that more can be done in the Rural Development budget for sheep farmers. There is an increasing need for a sheep scheme. Suckler farmers have the BDGP but sheep farmers have nothing.

Given the slow roll-out of the RD programme against a backdrop of a CAP reform process, it seems to us that there will be a need to ensure that all funds in the RDP are used. For instance, this year's budget is forecasting a spend of €494 million in 2016. This suggests that for each subsequent year, average spend in the programme will have to exceed €590 million.

ICSA proposes that a sheep scheme could be funded up to €25 million per annum within the RD programme limits, or with a small top-up from exchequer funds. ICSA introduced this proposal to the Oireachtas Agriculture Committee at Leinster House recently.

However, John Brooks says there is a subtle but hugely significant difference between an Irish rural development scheme payment and a flat rate coupled ewe payment across Europe. "A rural development scheme requires participants to take measures to improve the efficiency or the genetics in their sheep enterprise. As such, it is only attractive to the committed sheep farmer and it can be limited to existing sheep farmers who will put the effort in. On the other hand, a coupled payment that has no strings attached is a lethal weapon because it risks upsetting the supply of sheep across Europe.

That's why we are very concerned about the EU reflection group proposing a flat €20/ewe for every ewe in Europe. It's no surprise that this group would come up with this as there are several meat factory representatives on it from Ireland. Their interest is clear; make sheep more plentiful and as sure as night follows day, price drops.

Declan Fennell of Bord Bia has been quite clear in pointing out that the price performance of Irish lamb in 2015 has been absolutely linked to the balance between supply and demand across markets.

Extra breeding ewes in France, the UK and elsewhere is a potential time bomb for Irish sheep producers and it would be very short-sighted for any Irish farm organisation to back it.

## EID TAGGING

Moves to introduce electronic tagging by the Department of Agriculture have also caused serious concern for many sheep farmers. ICSA has yet to be convinced that this will do anything other than increase costs for farmers. We are particularly adamant that there is no justification for electronic tagging of lambs going direct to slaughter in meat plants. ICSA is also concerned that EID will be very uneconomic for hill sheep farmers who have no choice but to sell low value lambs in marts.

As we know the factories and marts favour the introduction of EID tags. They justify this on the basis of the efficiencies they can introduce within their operational and management systems. While there is a benefit to farmers buying store lambs, ICSA believes that increased cost around EID must be accompanied by a more practical approach on tagging at inspection time, especially for hoggets at this time of the year.

ICSA remains sceptical about whether EID tagging will make any difference to the marketing of Irish lamb. Moreover, the presence of an electric tag will make no difference to enhancing traceability for the majority of lambs which are sent directly to factories from farms of birth. The EID tag loses relevance as soon as the animal is slaughtered and reaches the end of the kill line in the factory.

ICSA is also concerned at suggestions that the Department would consider introducing a single supplier for sheep tags. Competition is essential and in fact, we believe that there should be competition in the supply of cattle tags as well. This is not just about the cost of the initial tags; it is also about the cost and frequency of replacing tags.

Currently, no decision has been made regarding EID tagging. Should any form of tagging be made mandatory, ICSA will be vigorously challenging the excessive bureaucracy which is hindering the live exports of sheep. Current live shipping regulations would need to be changed to coincide with those of bovine regulations – with no unnecessary holding period for sheep.

## CHLAMYDIAL ABORTION IN EWES



Niall McDonald MBV

In practice I have seen the serious economic consequences of abortion of ewes, not to mention the stress an upset for farmers pulling dead lambs from ewes. What's important to bear in mind is that it's not just the abortion but weak lambs not sucking and the resulting perinatal mortality and ill thrive.

Enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE) is a common cause of abortion in Irish flocks. I have seen it cause abortion storms with 1/4 and more aborting. This decimation of the lamb harvest can be devastating. Early veterinary intervention via sending maternal bloods and aborted foetuses for lab diagnosis is crucial (even more for next spring and planning vaccination). Mark and isolate aborted ewes from pregnant ewes immediately while you await results.

Don't vaccinate blind!! Vaccinating for toxoplasma won't help your problem with EAE, although vaccinating for both is a commonly used and successful strategy.

In consultation with your vet, a comprehensive and effective vaccine can be used the following year (this vaccine will last three years) and another spring of misery can be avoided!





# ICSA Visits to Agricultural Colleges



The Suckler Shed at Gurteen

## GURTEEN

ICSA Offaly chairman William Reid and Martin Kavanagh from Cow Solutions recently hosted an exciting event in Gurteen Agricultural College in Co. Tipperary. The event entitled 'Calf to beef. How to make the most of your herd' illustrated how Mr Kavanagh plans the feed intake of the calves there and monitors the results.

The event began in the suckler shed where Mr Kavanagh explained the vital role good shed design plays in keeping calves healthy and thriving. Sheds must be dry, warm and well ventilated. An ambient temperature of 15°C is considered ideal with good ventilation in place to eliminate stale air and bugs. He explained that if an animal gets sick for just one day, it takes an extra fifty nine days to finish. The objective is to keep them healthy and get mortality rates below 2%.

Next stop was the dairy bred shed. The need for dry ventilated sheds was again stressed. Calves are fed two bags of milk replacer or equivalent. This is a high protein creep feed starting at 3 weeks of age. Spring born calves get meal all summer while out on grass. Autumn born calves get creep feed all winter, but don't get meal at grass. Emphasis at Gurteen is placed on getting calves growing well in the first seven months leading to better outcomes all round.

Finally the finishing shed was visited. Here Mr Kavanagh outlined the different diets for different ages. For the final few weeks there was no grass silage being used. He reminded those attending that the critical period is up to 12 weeks, then up to seven months or approximately 200 days. If this period is well executed and calves are kept well, then everything else falls in to place, he said.

Average weight gains were as follows as of late Nov 2105:

Sept 2014 Bulls - 531kgs,

Sept 2013 Friesian Bullocks - 790kgs,

Sept /Oct 2014 Suckler Bulls - 719kgs,

Heifers early 2014 - 755kgs

2015 spring born Suckler Heifers - 408kgs,

2015 spring born Black Limousin Bullocks - 616kgs.

A big thank you to all who attended and to Martin Kavanagh and William Reid for a very enjoyable and informative day. Also, thanks go to John Grennan from Grennans of Rath and Ivan Hastings of Abbey Mills in Roscrea for their kind sponsorship of the event.



Martin Kavanagh from Cow Solutions

## KILDALTON

Last Autumn ICSA made a visit to Kildalton Agricultural College in Kilkenny to discuss and observe alternative farming methods. The event was a great success with the Calf to Beef and Suckler herds being the main topic of interest for ICSA farmers. John Halley (Munster ICSA Vice President) was instrumental in organising the trip and felt it would be a great opportunity for our members to see and discuss alternative farming methods with trained experts detailing key performance targets for cattle.



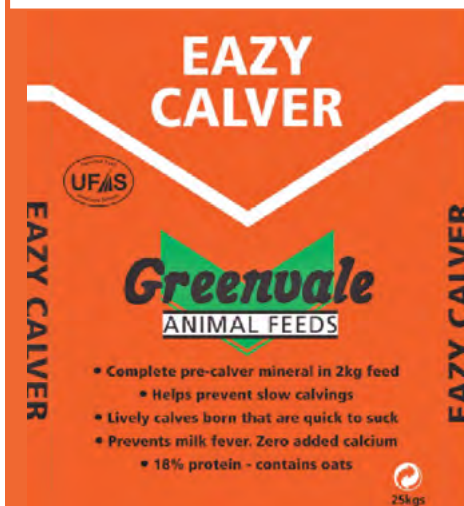
Some of the attendees at ICSA's Kildalton Event

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## ICSA IN BOTSWANA CONSULTANCY PROJECT

In 2015, ICSA was awarded a contract from the Centre for Development of Enterprise (CDE) to provide consultancy to farm representative associations in Botswana to assist them to take a more professional approach towards their development.

The awarding body, the CDE, is a collaborative effort between the government of Botswana and the EU. Funding is being directed to help progress private sector business development as a means of diversifying the Botswana economy away from too much dependence on mineral and diamond exports. Botswana has experienced success in tourism and it is one of the world's foremost safari destinations particularly linked to the Okavango Delta and huge game reserves such as Moremi and the Chobe national park.

Much of the Kalahari desert is also located in Botswana, and it makes up 70% of the national territory. Botswana is home to a wide array of wildlife with elephants, lions, rhinos, cheetah and antelopes particularly notable.

The territory of Botswana is about equivalent to the size of France but with a population of just over 2 million, it is one of the world's most sparsely populated countries.

It gained independence from Britain in 1966 and has made great strides since in economic development and it has maintained a stable democracy with regular elections and a well-functioning parliamentary democracy.

Botswana is now one of the richest countries in Africa with average GDP/capita of some US \$18,000. Education is widespread and literacy levels are excellent. The health services are relatively well developed although HIV is a



**ICSA's Malcolm Thompson and Eddie Punch with Nico Henning, owner of one of the biggest feedlots in Botswana, located in the Kalahari Desert**

massive problem, but one which is being successfully tackled.

Agriculture is a significant part of the economy of Botswana, but the export of diamonds along with tourism development means that its contribution to GDP has fallen from 40% at independence to 2.4% in 2007.

Nonetheless, it remains hugely important in social terms. There are as many cattle as people in Botswana (2 million) along with 1.5 million goats and some 270,000 sheep. With a total of some 120,000 farm holdings, agriculture is everywhere.

Agriculture is dominated by communal holdings, vast, open expanses where grazing rights are linked to owning a borehole for water but there are also commercial fenced farms particularly down in the Kalahari region.

This hits you when you see cattle

wandering around the streets and suburbs of major towns like Maun which has an international airport (albeit small) and which is the recognised gateway to the Delta.

Botswana's potential to export meat (or livestock) is significant. Realising that potential is not easy. The sector is hampered by FMD problems which impacts on access to export markets. Producers are experiencing severe economic difficulties due to lack of outlets for cattle. Drought is also an ever-present threat to the viability of farming.

At ground level, farmers are not well organised and it is believed that Botswana farmers need more effective representative associations to contribute to the national objective of improving agriculture's contribution to the economy as well as working together and with other agencies to devise and implement effective solutions to the many challenges faced by farmers.

The ICSA challenge was to help seven different farmer associations, (3 in the Ngamiland region, near to the Okavango Delta and 4 in the Ghanzi region, deep in the heart of the Kalahari desert).

ICSA general secretary Eddie Punch and former president Malcolm Thompson headed to Botswana in June 2015 for the first of three visits to analyse the background and to devise a strategy to assist the associations develop.

Even though June is the middle of the winter in Botswana, daytime temperatures were a pleasant 27 degrees, but it got chilly at night. The second visit was undertaken



**Cattle in the feedlot are a mixture of continental and traditional European breeds typically crossed with the native Brahman which are very adapted to the heat**



**Eddie Punch and Malcolm Thompson with farmers from the Ghanzi region**

in September, again by Punch and Thompson, and the final visit was carried out by ICSA president Patrick Kent and Malcolm Thompson in November where temperatures were in the high thirties.

The strife over land ownership which has been a feature of neighbouring Zimbabwe and which remains a potential unresolved problem in other countries in the region such as South Africa and Namibia does not seem to be an issue in Botswana.

With low population there is enough land to satisfy most and black and white farmers work side by side in apparent harmony down in Ghanzi. In fact, one of the white farmers we met was originally from Zimbabwe but he had lost his farm to Mugabe's land grab. He re-located to Botswana where he was farming a typical large scale commercial farm in the Kalahari Desert of some 6,400 ha (8km x 8km). This farm could carry about one cow to ten hectares, but this figure could fluctuate according to the severity of drought.

The beef sector in Botswana has a lot of potential but it also has a lot of problems. The statistic which really drives home the difficulty of beef farming in Botswana is the off-take rate of 8.4%. This is the amount of cattle sold as a percentage of total herd. It reflects the difficulty farmers have in getting cattle killed.

This comes down to the overall problems of the Botswana beef sector. Foot and



**Malcolm Thompson with farmers from the Ngamiland region**

Mouth is a problem in some regions such as Ngamiland. In these regions, markets for beef are limited to domestic outlets. In other strong cattle regions such as Ghanzi (in the Kalahari desert) foot and mouth has been kept out by a double fence and security checkpoints on the main highway. However, farmers there are also experiencing huge difficulties in getting cattle killed, and worse, in waiting months to get paid.

Irish farmers complain about the beef sector being dominated by a cartel of three major players. In Botswana, there is a state controlled monopoly for export beef – the BMC – and legislation prevents competition.

The Botswana authorities are believed to be reviewing the situation but in the meantime, the farmers are furious about the shortcomings of the BMC. They complain about poor marketing of Botswana beef, inefficiencies in the operation of BMC and delays in getting paid. Many farmers in Ngamiland have not been able to sell cattle to the BMC for years! In Ghanzi, former beef farmers have moved to suckler systems selling weaned stock to feedlots as they are more likely to get paid.

So how do they survive? Well systems of farming are ultra-low cost. Cattle graze outside for twelve months of the year so there are no housing costs, very little bought in feed and low machinery costs. The exception is feedlots where feed is lorried in and fed out with tractors.

Outdoors grazing all year round is possible in the warm, desert climate, because the Kalahari is not like the Sahara, but is a patchwork of small trees, scrub and grasses and

plants that can survive the arid conditions. They also provide shelter from the worst of the sun.

Waiting for the rains to come is like hoping for a good spell in Ireland. There is virtually no rain whatsoever in Botswana in the winter period which runs from March to October (Southern hemisphere) and they are dependent on reasonable rainfalls in their summer period especially in December and January.

Cattle are based on the Brahman breed, which are ideally adapted to surviving in dry, hot climates crossed with all sort of breeds more familiar to European farmers, including continental and traditional British. The most prized suckler cow seems to be the SimBra (Simmental x Brahman).

ICSA's job in Botswana was to help the farmer associations collaborate with each other and to develop a more professional approach towards lobbying, press and communications and the general management and governance of an association.



**Cattle roam freely on communal farms and, even on the highway, they regularly cross the road**



## ICSA Calls for Action on Flooding



The recent flooding has once again highlighted the need for a complete rethink as to how the River Shannon is managed and maintained. It has also highlighted the need for people to be adequately compensated should their homes and livelihoods be destroyed. ICSA has campaigned on both of these issues. We wait to see if the new Flood Management Agency has got the teeth to stand up to vested interests and do what needs to be done, not just talk about what needs to be done.

ICSA president Patrick Kent said “Much of the problems along the Shannon could be greatly improved if dredging of the River Shannon was carried out to remove the silt and debris impeding the flow of water right through to where it meets the ocean.”

ICSA has also pointed out that a properly funded and supported afforestation programme could help to prevent such extensive flooding. Forests can act as a barrier to floodwater, with trees increasing water absorption into the ground, they also prevent soil erosion and reduce sediment going in rivers all of which would help to lower peak flood levels.

## ICSA wants better incentives for alternatives due to negative margins in livestock enterprises

ICSA is arguing for better incentives for alternative land uses given the persistently poor and often negative margins associated with livestock enterprises. A motion was passed at the December national executive, following a proposal from Donegal ICSA, which suggests that ag policy should actively favour a reduction of some 5% of land currently in livestock in favour of other enterprises such as forestry and energy crops. The logic is clear: over supply of cattle is killing viability for cattle farmers and there is also a need to guard against increases in sheep numbers. This is because the evidence points to over supply as being the reason for unviable prices. Farmers need real alternatives but many are deterred from putting land to other uses due to uncertain or insufficient supports.

For example, the afforestation programme is not enticing farmers due to a maximum 15 years of forestry premia, after which you are on your own. In the case of hardwoods, this means no income for years on end. ICSA wants to see real, worthwhile incentives that give farmers real options.

This would tackle the issue of over-production of livestock as well as improving our carbon footprint as part of our obligations to meet climate change objectives.

## ICSA Helps Stop Greenway in its Tracks

ICSA welcomed the announcement that Minister Paschal Donoghue was pausing the plans for a Greenway cycle route through farmland in Galway and Roscommon for the time being.

ICSA has fully supported the local farmers on this issue over the past twelve months, with meetings organised to address farmers concerns throughout the region. These meetings were organised in conjunction with the Greenway Alliance Group led by Adrian Kelly. The number of attendees at each event clearly displayed the level of distress amongst farmers. It was clear to ICSA that the opposition to this project is resolute and deeply held.

The main bone of contention was the lack of consultation with farmers along the proposed route. Farmers were simply unwilling to countenance the proposals being pushed upon them when there were alternative routes for the available. ICSA and farmers stressed they were not anti-tourism however, merely anti the cycleway cutting through family farms with farmers being forced to sacrifice their land, privacy and security.

ICSA believes that any future plans need to be teased out through a proper consultation process with landowners

first and foremost. The mistake was made in that a top-down approach was taken with the employment of expensive outside consultants who were operating on the basis of maps and theory but who had little regard for local communities.

No tourism project can be a success without the goodwill and active positive engagement of locals. The talk of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) in this case shows a failure to understand this basic reality. ICSA criticised these threats and insists that CPOs should only ever apply to vital national infrastructure.

The decision demonstrates that any project of this nature needs to be developed with

the support of local landowners and that there must be respect for the legitimate worries of farmers. This is a vindication of people power in the region where farmers standing together have achieved a result.

ICSA has committed to remaining vigilant on the issue. While this result was good news in the short-term, local farmers would have to continue to stand together if and when the plans are resurrected. Governments need to recognise that tourism projects can only be successful with the goodwill of those most directly affected. It is a profound mistake to think that the will of local communities can be trampled upon and ICSA hopes that this lesson will be learned for any future plans.



ICSA hosts Greenway concerned farmers in Loughrea, Co. Galway



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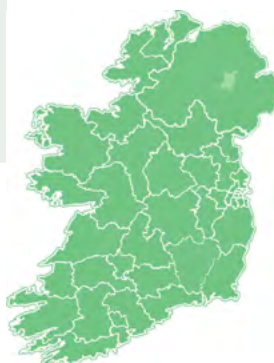
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# An association of farmers FOR farmers ICOSA pre-election manifesto GE 2016

## Four key pillars for government strategy

### No 1:

**Provide a regulatory environment and a public support regime that's fair to all farmers**

### No 2:

**A clear focus on producing only what there are viable markets for**

### No 3:

**Do everything possible to get a fair share of profits for farmers**

### No 4:

**Put live exports top of the agenda**



### No 1:

**Provide a regulatory environment and a public support regime that's fair to all farmers.**

- Against unfair LPIS overclaim penalties on disadvantaged farmers with marginal land
- Fair and reduced inspections and a charter for Bord Bia audits
- Better RD programme which delivers money to farmers not professionals; seeking reversal of cuts to disadvantaged areas (ANC)
- Fair deal for hen harrier and other designated farmers - every designated hectare must be compensated
- Justice for old young farmers who have missed out on access to national reserve
- Opposition to Right to Roam and re-assertion of property rights of farmers including opposition to all CPOs for non-essential infrastructure or tourism projects
- Flexibility in BDGP scheme
- A scheme for sheep farmers within the RD programme
- Climate change debate: farmers are being wrongly targeted on emissions and not getting the credit on sequestration.
- Payment on time for all farmers under all schemes
- Cattle and Sheep farmers should be entitled to the same support the dairy sector got for income falls
- No to compulsory EID in cattle and no to EID for lambs destined for the factory; open up tag supplies to competition

### No 3:

**Do everything possible to get a fair share of profits for farmers.**

- Challenging 30 months cut off and low weight limits; demanding beef grid review
- Totally opposed to bad TTIP/ Mercosur deals for beef farmers
- A regulator of the food chain at EU level to blow open who makes what out of our produce
- Proper scrutiny of meat industry including permanent on-site monitoring of trim & grading
- Increased inheritance tax thresholds, full earned income tax credit (€1650) for self-employed; abolition of USC
- Review of all statutory levies and an end to non-statutory levies deducted without your permission
- Fair deal for farmers with banking problems, better access to credit
- Seeking a review of all statutory levies and an end to non-statutory levies deducted without your permission

### No 2:

**A clear focus on producing only what there are viable markets for.**

- Convinced our clean green image is our greatest asset; being seen as pro GM could ruin image of Kerrygold and grass fed beef and lamb exports
- Less focus on expansion as extra production leads to lower farm prices
- Move 5% of land away from livestock by better supports for alternative land use such as forestry and energy crops
- Opposed to supports which lead to higher production such as an EU wide coupled ewe support which will flood market with more lamb at expense of existing Irish producers

### No 4:

**Put live exports top of the agenda.**

- Demanding that live exports are given the same diplomatic push by Government as meat exports
- Working to solve labelling blockage of live exports to NI and GB
- Remove holding period for sheep live exports



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Farming Independent Editor Louise Hogan chairing a question & answer session with John Gilmore of FarmLab Diagnostics



Shining Examples of the Mountbellew Limousin Suckler Herd



The Sheep Shed at Mountbellew

# ICSA Spring Sheep

## Mountbellew Agricultural



**John Brooks**  
ICSA Sheep Chairman

- A policy that focuses on increasing sheep numbers would be bad news for sheep farmers
- The decline in sheep numbers across Europe over the last 20 years has resulted in increased prices due to scarcity
- ICSA opposes any scheme, such as an EU wide coupled ewe premium, which would serve only to increase numbers and decrease price
- A universal premium would disrupt the fine balance between supply and demand which has been working well for us in recent times
- ICSA believes it would be far better to focus on a targeted sheep scheme within the rural development programme in Ireland



Prize winners on the night with the Chanelle team



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# Sheep Seminars 2016

at College and Ballybofey



Seminar attendees listen to John Kelly discussing the performance of the Mountbellew Flock



ICSA Sheep Chairman John Brooks, Louise Hogan Editor of the Farming Independent and Pat Loughnane ICSA Galway Chairman



**John Gilmore**  
FarmLab Diagnostics  
Parasite Control, Anthelmintic Resistance in Sheep & Optimum Health in the Ewe Flock

- Resistance is a growing issue in sheep flocks
- Farmers can no longer assume that all parasites will be killed off by worming
- Resistant worms or the "hardy bucks" will continue to cause problems particularly if the flock has been moved to a new pasture as this actually inches = asked the selection for resistant worms
- When dosing, alternate between yellow drench, white drench and clear drench to avoid building up resistance
- Highest risk fluke period is from June to November – most noticeable damage can be seen late in the year
- Reduce contact with mud snails by fencing off wet areas and ponds
- Watch out for clostridial disease as an indicator for fluke



**Dr Tim Keady**  
Principal Sheep Research Scientist, Teagasc  
Profitable Prime Lamb Production

### Nutrition in Pregnancy

- Optimum nutrition in late pregnancy is crucial
- The optimum live weight for a single lamb is 6kk, 5.5kg for twins and 4.5kg for triplets
- For every 0.5kg increase in lamb birth weight, this translates to 1.7kg of weaning weight
- Good quality silage is vital. Where quality is around 77DMD, supplementation can be reduced from 20kg of concentrates to 5kg in the last six weeks of pregnancy

### Castration

- Significant benefits for keeping ram lambs entire
- Data shows leaving rams entire can lead them to being 1.8kg heavier at slaughter and that slaughter occurs 16 days earlier
- Castrated lambs would need an extra 17kg of concentrates to achieve the same level of performance as an entire ram lamb
- Taste tests show there is no significant difference in the flavour of the castrate lambs versus the entire lambs. In fact, the meat from the entire lambs was slightly more tender

### Supplementation for Triplet Lambs

- 85kg of additional concentrates is required to produce triplet lambs to the same weight as twin lambs. In late pregnancy ewes with triplets need an additional 7kg of concentrate over twin carrying ewes



A Proud Ewe with Lamb in the Mountbellew Sheep Shed

# ICSA Spring Sheep Seminars 2016



**Eoghan Finneran**  
Agricultural Consultant  
Increased Production from Mixed Species Pasture

Mixed species pasture swards are reseeded swards based on perennial ryegrass but including herbs and legumes such as Red & White Clovers, Chicory, Plantain and perhaps other grass species such as Timothy, Cocksfoot and Meadow Fescue.

**Advantages:**

1. They require significantly less Nitrogen fertiliser due to the Nitrogen fixing ability of the clover.
  2. Mixed swards have a Crude Protein content up to 5% greater than a perennial ryegrass only sward. This means that growth rates in lambs and milk yield in ewes can be increased and creep feeding at grass can be eliminated.
  3. Mixed swards are high in trace elements such as Copper, Cobalt, Selenium and Iodine meaning that animal thrive will be improved and costly mineral supplementation of stock can be reduced.
  4. These swards are more persistent as they form a thick sward which helps suppress weeds.
  5. They are more tolerant of poorly drained, drought prone or poorly fertile soils relative to perennial ryegrass.
- They also result in a reduced carbon footprint as reseeding is required less frequently and expensive nitrogen fertiliser is reduced.

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**Clonleigh Co-Op at Ballybofey Sheep Seminar**



**Animax Stand at Mountbellew Sheep Seminar. Animax supply a range of trace element boluses**



**Large Crowd in attendance at Ballybofey Sheep Seminar**



**Guest speakers John Brooks, Malcolm Thompson, Keith Thompson and Edward Browne in Ballybofey**



**Tom Foley, Leonard Hegarty and Bernie Butler all from Paul & Vincent, suppliers of top quality ration to Mountbellew College**

## A Big Thank You

A big thank you to Mountbellew Agricultural College for hosting this ICSA Sheep Seminar. It was obvious that a lot of hard work had been done by all the staff and students in preparation for the event. Sincere thanks go to Tom Burke, Vincent Flynn, John Kelly and Martina Donnelly and all the eager students who helped out on the day.

A big thank you to our main sponsor Chanelle Veterinary and to all our other sponsors; Paul & Vincent, Cormac Tags & Sheep Equipment, Animax, Clonleigh Co-Op and Dolan Farm Supplies.

A big thank you to Louise Hogan, Editor of the Farming Independent for making the trip to Mountbellew and chairing the indoor seminar.

A big thank you to ICSA sheep chairman John Brooks, to ICSA Galway chairman Pat Loughnane and Donegal chairman Malcolm Thompson for all their hard work and also to Edward Browne and Keith Thompson for their presentations in Ballybofey.

Finally, a very special thank you to all the Mountbellew catering team who warmed us up with pots of tea and coffee. Their platters of sandwiches and hot nibbles were very much appreciated by all.

## Rural Isolation and Mental Health in Farming

ICSA's Rural Development Chairman Seamus Sherlock was a guest speaker at a number of hugely successful events on Rural Isolation and Mental Health in farming which were held recently in Co. Clare. These events, which were organised by an Garda Síochána, were each attended by an estimated crowd of one hundred and fifty people. ICSA was present to support this drive to highlight the problems of rural isolation and mental health in farming and to listen to farmers concerns.

Also guest speaking was Garda Chief Superintendent John Kerin. He alluded to a possible link between farm accidents and fatigue and stress caused by the increasing pressures farmers are facing. Indeed, there can be no doubt that such a link exists. Farming remains a dangerous profession with a strikingly high incidence of fatalities each year.

Agreeing, Mr Sherlock said there could be no doubt that the stress farmers are under can lead to accidents. He urged farmers who were feeling under pressure, particularly from financial issues to avail of the help that's out there. "Even if a situation seems beyond resolution there is always a way". Mr Sherlock who himself is highly active in supporting farmers facing pressure from banks and creditors urged farmers "not to fear judges as he had never found one that wouldn't listen and consider cases carefully".

The closure of local shops, post offices, bank branches and Garda stations was noted as adding to the sense of loneliness felt in rural communities. The growing problem of rural crime and mental health issues

arising from social isolation and financial problems were highlighted again and again. At the most recent event held in Kilmihill on Tuesday, February 16th the issue of

rural broadband was also raised repeatedly. There is no doubt that patchy broadband service in rural areas is having a huge impact on farmers and their ability to

complete online Department application forms etc.

Mr Sherlock made a commitment on behalf of ICSA to ensure that all of the issues raised are not ignored.

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