



Irish Grassland Association Summer Dairy Tour

This summer's Irish Grassland Association dairy tour was held in County Laois on Tuesday, July 9th with attendees visiting Bruce Thompson's farm along with Roy and Trevor Cobbe's holding.

Bruce is the eighth generation to farm his home farm in Ballyfin and he took up this role in 2003 leaving a career in engineering. A fourth generation farmer, Trevor Cobbe has worked alongside his father Roy since 2010, when he completed his degree in architectural technology.

Both farms have expanded over the years from 50-plus cows to the figures they presented on the day (all detailed on the table overleaf). Bruce is milking in a 40-unit rotary while the Cobbes are looking to develop from the current six unit double up to a 20-unit herringbone, while considering a discussion on the farm walk that was centred around the potential of robotic milking systems.

Bruce highlighted how he manages staff on a larger scale dairy operation and uses novel approaches to maximise the flexibility for both his staff and his own time. Two apps were pivotal to time management: namely TimeTree (an interactive calendar that all members of the team and his family can use) and Trello (a live day-to-day to-do list with different priority features) along with fortnightly in person team meetings.

Finally, the theme of biodiversity was discussed. Bruce is well-known for his extensive knowledge of dung beetles and for bringing their relevance to light in Irish farming. And when it comes to his own farm, he has also advocated very strongly about improving habitat diversity. Several measures are taken on the farm including hedge row management and planting trees not only in field margins but also in the middle of paddocks. (PTO)



Biodiversity was among the topics discussed on July 9th.

Harvest Update

The late sowing and difficult growing conditions for crops has meant the 2024 harvest didn't commence until mid-July. It has been a challenging time for tillage farmers with high volumes of rain leading to difficult conditions for harvesting Winter Barley and saving straw. We hope that August will see a big improvement in the weather for the remainder of the harvest.



It's been a challenging time for tillage farmers.



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The poor conditions didn't dampen the spirits of attendees on both farms.

(From front) Bruce finished the session by raising the motion that the next generation may not remember him most for his KPIs but how he left the landscape and biodiversity for them to pass on. Roy and Trevor are both very happy with the partnership arrangement on their farm and feel it is a very successful way of bringing two people into the one farming system. They will maintain their focus on improving forage and grass along with improving cow genetics and milk solids production going forward. Additionally, they aim to continually improve their labour efficiency and the lifestyle that the farm will afford them. Both have different approaches to addressing how best to utilise a dairy farm in terms of financially providing for their families while also improving their respective business outcomes.

	Bruce Thompson	Roy & Trevor Cobbe
No. Cows	270	120
Breed Type	Jersey x Friesian	Holstein x Friesian
Cow Weight	470kg	590kg
Milk Production	460 kg MS (2023)	545 kg MS (2023)
Concentrate Use	1100 kg (2023)	1100 kg (2023)
Grass Growth	13T/ha (2023)	15T/ha (2023)
EBI	€236	€235
6 week calving rate	93%	89%
Calving Interval	370 days	370 days
Empty Rate	8%	10%
Breeding Season	12 weeks	12 weeks
Labour	2 Full-time + (3-4 part time/seasonal)	2 Full-time

Teagasc Calf to Beef Demonstration Farm Findings



Teagasc has joined with Dawn Meats and Shinagh Estates to examine a calf to beef enterprise that's being run on a farm in Ballyvadin near Fethard in Tipperary. The farm has 112 ha of free draining soil and the target is to stock 95 ha with 335 calves finishing them on the farm. This results in a target of producing 3.5 cattle per ha annually with 1000kg of carcass weight/ha or 285 kg/head averaged between steers and heifers.

This production will require 13t/ha of grass growth per year with 10.5t of utilisation and target 500kg of concentrate per animal. The target growth rate is 850 grams per day on the farm for an ambitious return on labour of €50 per hour worked. Calves are purchased based on a model that offers the seller an advantage for both weight above 44kg and CBV (Commercial Beef Value) above €77. Calves are bought at 47 kg at 19 days of age and are expected to be weaned on 30kg of milk replacer at eight weeks of age (85 kg body weight consuming 1.5 kg of concentrate) following a transition to once per day feeding from day 26 to day 30 of life. Post weaning, they are allocated 1kg of concentrate for a maximum of five weeks.

The main story of the recently held open day centred around CBV and its response in cattle growth rate. Figures were quoted of €1 of CBV returning €1.85. However, taking the actual production from the 2022 performance €1 of CBV returned €1.40 for heifers and €1.15 for Steers. Although it is early to get a very certain handle on the return from CBV the trend is extremely positive and consistent with the information disseminated at the Teagasc Grange Open Day. A major benefit of high CBV value cattle is that they perform equally well being fed at grass before the second winter or getting a winter finishing period, whereas low CBV cattle required the second winter finishing period to realise 300kg carcass weight.

Iverk Show 2024



Once again, Bretts will be attending the Iverk Show on Saturday, August 24th. We look forward to seeing you at the showgrounds in Piltown for the annual event which was first held in 1896!

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