

# FARMING WITH **NATURE** ON A COMMERCIAL IRISH DAIRY FARM

*Gerard MacMahon*

*Irish Dairy Farmer*

*Tuesday 29th August*



# ABOUT THE FARM

- **Location: County Cork, South of Ireland.**
  - Farm purchased in 1959 by Father
  - Gerard began farming in **1987.**
- **Activities: 72 Dairy Cows Spring Calving.**
- **20 Males finished as beef at 20 months.**
- **Surplus heifers sold as replacement for other farms.**
- Grass based system
- Farm in **Nitrates Derogation:**
  - **Stocking Rate +2.5LU/HA**





# 20% SPACE FOR NATURE

*Shrubland,  
Hedgerows,  
Ditches,  
Trees, River,  
Ponds.*



# RIVERSIDE WALK

- **Short Nature Walk** with running stream & canopy of trees
- **Abundance of native plants & trees:**
  - Oak, Hazel, Sally, Willow, Whitethorn, ferns, moss, etc.
- **Habitats for local wildlife:**
  - Blue Jay, Black Birds, Small Birds, etc.
- **Peaceful space created** in the last 5-6 years.

# BIRDS ON THE FARM



**YELLOWHAMMER**



**BLUE TIT**



**GOLDFINCH**



**SWALLOW**



**SONG THRUSH**



**BLACKBIRD**



**ROBIN**



**STONECHAT**

# BIRDS ON THE FARM



**KESTREL**



**SPARROWHAWK**



**BUZZARD**



**LONG TAILED TIT**



**BARN OWL**



**BLUE JAY**



**GREAT TIT**



**COAL TIT**

# HEDGEROWS

- **Approx. 12,000m of Diverse Hedgerows.**
  - 200m were newly planted 20 years ago.
  - Provide food, shelter and movement corridors for native wildlife.
  - **Wildlife:** Birds, Bats, Hedgehogs, Field Mice, Shrews, Badgers, etc.
- **Ecosystem services:**
  - Shelter for livestock, pollination, flood prevention, water quality protection.
- Hedgerows maintained **manually.**



*The Hedgerows are teeming with Pollinators & Butterflies this time of year.*

# LOCAL WILDLIFE



**HEDGEHOG**



**PYGMY  
SHREW**



**WOOD  
MOUSE**



**BROWN RAT**



**BADGER**



**RED FOX**



**RED SQUIRREL**



**PHEASANT**

# BIRD FEED COVER

- **0.4 HA Native Wildflower Bird Feed Area set Annually.**
  - €500 of farmer's own spending - outside schemes.
- **Mixture of Wildflowers & Plants.**
- **Alive with insects, butterflies, bees and birds.**



# BIRD FEED COVER: PLANTS



**PIONEER SUNFLOWER**



**RAMPART RAPE**



**WHITE MUSTARD**



**REDSHANK**



**TRITICALE**



**TORO FODDER RADISH**



**PHACELIA**



**RED AND WHITE MILLET**

# DAIRY HERD

- **72 Dairy Cows**
  - Predominantly **Grassfed Diet.**
  - Winter feed grown on farm.
- Milked twice a day
  - 4.5% BF, 3.8% Protein
- All Dairy Female are Genotyped

- **450,000 litres** of milk produced a year.
  - 6,000 litres per cow a year.
- Herd EBI (Economic Breeding Index) **top 1% in Ireland**
- 4 Bulls selected for breeding with AI companies



# LOW EMISSION SLURRY SPREADING



**Dairy Farms under derogation in Ireland must use LESS: Low Emission Slurry Spreading. LESS uses slurry application techniques such as trailing hose or trailing shoe to reduce the amount of harmful Nitrous Oxide and Ammonia displaced into the atmosphere.**

# PROTECTED UREA

- **Nitrogen** Urea Fertiliser that has been coated with a **urease inhibitor** to reduce **ammonia loss and reduces the harmful greenhouse gas "nitrous oxide"**, without affecting performance.
- Recommended by Teagasc (Ireland's Agricultural State Agency) as the least harmful chemical fertiliser.



# OLD APPLE ORCHARD

- Almost 100 years old.
- Apples harvested late August/September for family and friends.
- Mixture of native Irish Apple varieties.



# TRADITIONAL FARM LIFE

- **Cats** for rodent control.
- Handcrafted **Stone Wall** features.
- **Vegetable Garden** for family and friends.



# BENEFITS OF FARMING ALONGSIDE NATURE

- **Hedgerows and Ditches** are vital habitats for wildlife.
- You can **farm with profit** while protecting and **enhancing the wildlife & biodiversity**.
- Nature **adds interest** to the farm, it is a pleasant place to work.
- **Increase of positive** insects, pollinators, birds.
- Nature is **ever-changing**
  - Flowers, fruit, hazelnuts.



# CHALLENGES

- **Cost** – huge challenge this year.
- **Price Volatility.**
- **Manual Labour:**
  - **Electric fences** must be cleared of hedgerow obstruction manually.
- **Strict Regulations.**
  - Nitrates regulations.
  - Not always sensible!
- **Factory Beef Grading** is a problem.



# LESSONS LEARNED

- **Habitats must be retained and enhanced**, rather than manually creating new habitats.
- **Grazing Livestock** important for flora & can enhance biodiversity.
- **Land abandonment is negative** for biodiversity.



# THANK YOU FOR LISTENING



*Presented by  
Gerard MacMahon*

Happy to answer any questions.

**My Question to you:**

What more could I do to enhance biodiversity?

