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The Teagasc Future Beef programme was launched in December to show to beef farmers how they can produce a quality product as efficiently and sustainably as possible. The Kingstons' farm in Drimoleague was selected as one of 22 demonstration farms

Making beef farming more profitable and eco-friendly



Anna Sexton



THE Teagasc Future Beef programme, launched officially in December 2021, aims to create more sustainable and profitable farms; reduce GHG and ammonia emissions; improve water quality and improve biodiversity.

There are 22 demonstration farms nationwide, two of which are located in West Cork. Performance on the farms participating in the programme will be recorded throughout the year and monitoring the farms will allow us to measure the impact of improved technical efficiency on profitability and the environment.

All results will be communicated through the Future Beef website, social media, discussion group visits and farm walks.

William Kingstons farms with his wife Diana, son Mark and daughters Chloe and Aisling in Drimoleague.

He works fulltime off-farm while Diana is very involved in the day-to-day running of the farm.

Both Aisling and Mark work fulltime off-farm, and Chloe is in first year in university.

Mark helps on the farm in the evenings and weekends.

The Kingstons have a 33-cow suckler herd, predominantly autumn calving. They sell the bulls at under 16 months and sell the heifers at 22 months.

The herd consists of Charolais, Limousin, Parthenaise, Aubrac and Angus Cross-breeds. William uses 100% AI to allow him to use the best genetics available.

The farm is 29ha in size and is split into two separate land blocks, 6km apart. The first block is nine hectares in size and the second block is 20ha.

Slilage is predominately taken from the smaller land block while the larger land block is well laid out on grazing with a central farm roadway.

The winter housing is located on both and the Kingstons have plans to improve the winter housing with a new slatted unit in 2022.

In February, the grazing block is well laid out in 16 paddocks with scope to split fields further with temporary fencing. William has started using PastureBase to measure grass and improve grassland performance. Any repairs and maintenance to fences and paddock boundaries will be carried out during the month of February.

For soil fertility, 60 tonne of ground limestone was spread on the farm following on from soil samples taken in January 2021.

Slurry and fertiliser will be applied in accordance with the resultant fertiliser plan from February onwards.

Further soil samples were taken in December 2021 and



Each member of the Kingston family plays a part in helping out on the beef farm.

the Kingstons are targeting a reduction in the farm's reliance on chemical nitrogen through further liming and use of slurry.

Cattle slurry was applied to the most suitable silage fields in January, using the dribble bar method. William hopes to apply lime to these fields 10 days after slurry application.

As William has an autumn calving herd, he plans to let

some of the weanlings out of the shed by day, depending on ground conditions.

Performance at grass will be a key focus in the years ahead to reduce costs and overall emissions.

The farms selected are representative of their region from farm size, soil type, system, stock numbers etc.

They face the same challenges as their neighbours and are therefore more relatable. However, all have a very pos-

itive attitude towards suckler farming. They are willing to take on new technologies and develop efficiencies to improve profitability and reduce the negative effects of agriculture on the environment around them.

For more on the programme visit teagasc.ie

• Anna Sexton is a business and technology beef advisor based in the Teagasc office in Skibbereen.

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Farm output cuts not discussed at government, Leo tells Cullinan

THERE has been no discussion at government level about restricting output at farm level in any sector.

That's what IFA president Tim Cullinan said Tánaiste Leo Varadkar told him at a meeting last week.

Amongst the issues discussed at their meeting were farming's climate targets, the Common Agricultural Policy, Brexit, rising input costs and work permits.

Mr Cullinan said everyone understands the need to work towards achieving sector emissions ceiling of between 16 to 18 mega tonnes of carbon, which is a reduction of between 22% and 30%.

However, he said, this must be achieved by continued research work to reduce methane output per animal not by

using a blunt instrument to limit output.

'IFA is totally opposed to any imposed limits on production,' he said.

'We need to allow time for what are very promising scientific solutions to take effect.

'We cannot use a blunt instrument to address our environmental challenges, which would have significant economic and social consequences,' he said.

'Costs have surged on farms this year and farmers cannot afford to have further restrictions placed on them,' he said.

On Cap, he said he made it clear that a cohort of the most productive farmers are going to have their incomes decimated.

'On Brexit, we reminded the Tánaiste that there were still

serious threats to Irish farming and that some sectors are already suffering the consequences,' he said.

'There are also labour shortages in farms and in the processing sector.

'While there has been an allocation of work permits for the sector, there are significant backlogs in the processing of permits which is causing great frustration,' he added.

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