

Breeding future stars

Alan Hurley equine specialist
Teagasc Rural Economy Development Programme

Jimmy Ryan hails from Kilnamack, Clonmel, Co Tipperary, and is a modest-scale but very successful horse breeder. Recently retired as principal at St Mary's National School, Jimmy has always had an interest in horses and started breeding over 30 years ago.

"I got my first mare from the late Ted Keane in Cloneen, a brilliant horseman. My foundation mares were by Clover Hill which were crossed with either Cruising or Cavalier Royale and kept the resulting fillies which gave me an excellent genetic base," says Jimmy.

A modest man, Jimmy Ryan has bred horses of the highest quality including Electric Cruise who competed at the London Olympics in 2012. He bred the mother, grandmother and great-grandmother of Electric Cruise.

The offspring from his Kilnamack broodmares have qualified for the RDS Dublin Horse Show on numerous occasions. When asked which mare has done the most for him as a breeder? Jimmy smiles and, without hesitation, says: "Kilnamac Sally (pictured), the mare that bred Electric Cruise and several other high-class winners. She is rising 23 this year and her progeny now forms a large part of my foundation stock today."

At its most fundamental level genetics involves the passing of genes (both favourable and unfavourable) from parents to offspring, and unlike

Jimmy Ryan.



management (i.e., nutrition, exercise, and health) genetic selection is permanent and cumulative. Therefore, genetic selection and optimum management when used together generate the best opportunity for improvement and enduring benefits over time.

This means that if a breeder introduces good genetics for traits such as soundness, performance and athleticism they can be improved every generation. This is fundamental to Jimmy's breeding. He says that he tries to "breed horses that are of higher genetic merit than the previous generation".

Nonetheless, if genetic selection mistakes are made then it can take several generations to undo those mistakes.

Fundamental to any breeding programme is a clearly defined breeding goal. A breeding goal should focus on quality over quantity using only proven mares and stallions with good genetics for soundness, temperament and performance traits so the resulting foals are meeting an industry demand.

Jimmy states that his goal is to "to produce a horse of international fame who will potentially jump 1.50m or go to 3* eventing". From talking with Jimmy, it is clear he has a passion and a focus on breeding the correct type of individual that meets a market requirement.

So what advice would you give to a young breeder? I asked. "Start with the very best mare you can afford and then objectively look at her faults and failings.

Then select a stallion that will complement her; the mare and the stallion's progeny should also be consistent performers.

"You need to be realistic of what the mare is capable of producing.

"I go to Lanaken every three years and enjoy watching the jumping but in particular I study the catalogue and look to see if there are any stallions that are a little bit



more prominent in producing show jumpers. I also attend the RDS young horse qualifiers every year and mark any notable stallions with several offspring as well as paying close attention to the dam lines.

"There are several young stallions that are proven to jump which I would love to use but they are not proven as sires and when you are in the market of selling foals you need to have a

proven pedigree," Jimmy says.

When picking a stallion Jimmy looks for four criteria: "Pedigree, conformation, stallion performance record, and the success of his progeny. Most of the stallions on the continent will tick all those criteria; similarly, those four criteria also apply when selecting your breeding mare," says Jimmy.

When it comes to selling foals, he

says: "It is essential you sell into a yard where you know the foal will be produced to reach its true potential." And what of Jimmy's breeding plans? "To continue to breed horses of international standard using the top-ranked sires listed on the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses. Now that I'm retired, I will consider keeping a few foals until they are three and see if they have a jump."



LEFT: Jimmy Ryan with Kilnamac Sally one of his most successful broodmares.

ABOVE: Electric Cruise ridden by Joseph Murphy.

Key messages

- You must define a clear breeding goal.
- A successful breeding programme needs to be based primarily on genetic selection in addition to phenotypic selection.
- Focus on breeding from mares that meet strict criteria such as soundness, pedigree, performance, athleticism, and temperament.
- Don't expect the stallion to compensate for too many faults on the part of the mare.
- Learn from your mistakes and, more importantly, learn from the mistakes of others.

Waterford sport horse breeders

In 2013, Jimmy joined the Waterford Sport Horse Breeders' discussion group. There are over 30 members across east Cork, south Tipperary and Waterford.

"It's invaluable because if I have a problem there is someone else who has also encountered the same issue. I can bounce ideas off other members to solve issues quickly and effectively and it also gives you a different perspective on things," says Jimmy.

"The group is very passionate and we all have a strong desire to learn from each other's production systems and improve our business. Everyone has something of interest to contribute. This year as a group we took professional footage of all foals. The footage was subsequently uploaded on to Facebook and Irish Horse Gateway." This proved to be a successful sales tool as he has already sold two foals using these platforms.

Kilkenny dairy farm yields a welcome dividend

Tom Houlihan, Michel Somers and Richard Walsh
Teagasc Forestry Development Department, Teagasc Crops Environment and Land Use Programme

Michael Owens farms near Castlecomer/Clough in north Kilkenny, a strong hurling country. A land-use decision taken by Michael's late father, Denis, in 1989 has yielded a welcome dividend.

"Myself and my brother Martin run a spring-calving dairy herd along with some beef cattle," says Michael. The brothers milk 125 cows on a holding of almost 80ha. Michael is keen on grassland management and uses Norwegian Red straws to achieve hybrid vigour in the herd.

"We want to do the job well and move forward but we don't believe in trying to maximise cow numbers for the sake of it. We try to do our best with our resources and there is certainly a role for forestry. With all the talk of carbon emissions, forestry will probably become even more important."

Michael and Martin recently installed a DeLaval robotic system with two milking units side by side. Adjustment to this new automation has been fairly seamless. "It has brought a balance to the farm workload and has made running the farm more manageable," says Michael. A complex system of chutes and gates makes managing individual cows straightforward and once milked animals are directed back to the right paddock during the grazing season.

Having trained in forestry, Michael's late father Denis planted 2.5ha of mainly spruce in conjunction with some broadleaf species in 1989. At the time, forests were a new enterprise and he felt there was merit in it, having received positive insights

from his training. "There was a little controversy at the time," says Michael, "particularly as the fields had some road frontage. But my father had great foresight and having overseen thinning operations followed by the final harvest of the timber in October 2018 it was a great decision."

The farm forest matured rapidly following two profitable thinnings in 2010 and 2014. The net productive area was 2.2ha. According to Michael, "Our experience is that it has only added to the place."

Michael continues: "We are very happy with the way the harvesting worked out. The whole job was done in three days, it has delivered over 750t (which converted to 820m³ freshly cut) and the price we will receive is about €55/t, perhaps even a bit more. We are lucky timber prices are strong at the moment. It will cost just over 10% of the money we receive to replant and put it back."

Strong demand

With strong demand for timber at present, farm forest owners have a valuable crop on their land. "I was impressed with the timber and return from the forest," says Michael. "It yielded pretty well, it was fairly straight and the product breakdown was 45% sawlog, 37% pallet wood and the remainder going to pulp. That's a pretty decent forestry yield."

Timber prices can vary over time and according to a range of factors such as tree quality, forest type, woodlot size, quality of access and



Kilkenny dairy farmer Michael Owens.

distance to market. Timber returns from managed forests are exempt from income tax but subject to relevant USC and PRSI charges.

Michael is also very aware of the need for protection and enhancement of his farm environment. He describes how during the harvest "number one, the weather was super, the ground was bone dry, there wasn't a mark on the ground, but the brash was piled up in rows along the site and the forwarder (collecting the timber) travelled along these.

"Basically, it doesn't touch the ground and didn't impact with the soil in any way."

The existing broadleaf trees in the

forest were retained and Michael will replant a further 10% through the site for environmental and aesthetic reasons.

Michael can now make plans for his forestry returns. "When you are farming you have a lot of options for what you are going to do with money. I have four children and hopefully they might go to college."

Many farmers like Michael have the potential to diversify their on-farm resource and future potential income streams. At the same, a growing forest can efficiently sequester carbon and can help in efforts to offset greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Through whole-farm planning, forests can be integrated into existing farms and provide options on

appropriate land parcels. Forestry premiums, combined with retained basic payments and tax-free returns generated from timber production, can diversify income streams and enhance family farm income.

Mortgage

For a younger farmer, forestry may provide an ideal way to help with the mortgage on a new family home or help towards sustainable farm investments. And for maturing farmers a forest can make an ideal pension pot.

Michael is now looking forward to getting the forest planted again and seeing the next forest establish and rapidly grow, adding with a smile: "Hopefully when I am about 70 I will get some retirement money out of it!"

Teagasc forestry clinics in 2019

Why should we focus on growing and utilising more grass?

Teagasc will run a nationwide series of forestry advisory clinics between 21 January and 1 February, promoting the establishment and management of forestry as a sustainable and rewarding land use on Irish farms.

These one-to-one clinics will be held in Teagasc offices around the country on specific dates, where a private individual consultation with an experienced forestry advisor can be arranged by appointment. The Forestry Programme offers landowners many options in relation to forest establishment, with a range of attractive grants and annual premium categories available.

A land use change to forestry, like any new farm enterprise, will raise many questions. A consultation with your Teagasc forestry advisor will provide independent and objective advice, empowering you to make informed decisions on many relevant issues including the following:

- Opportunities for farmers and other landowners to diversify farm enterprises and make marginal land work for them.
- Interaction with other farm schemes, e.g. Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS).
- Available funding streams.
- How forestry can improve farm income and the environment.
- How to apply and get the job done right first time.
- Managing the harvest and timber sales.

Although the emphasis for the upcoming clinics is on new planting, existing forest owners, regardless of what stage their forest is at, can also avail of this opportunity to pick up valuable management tips. Prior booking of a one-to-one forestry consultation is essential. Please bring maps and other relevant information on the day to optimise the advisory experience and outcome.

A total of 39 clinics are scheduled around the county. For details of a clinic taking place close to you, log on to: <https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/forestry/news/2019/forestry-clinics-january-2019.php> or contact your local Teagasc forestry staff.

These clinics provide an ideal opportunity to get answers to your forestry questions – don't miss out.