

# Pride and passion for drystock on display at Gurteen

Gurteen College is a private college, one of seven colleges in the Teagasc network

Gurteen College



**Molly Parry**  
Promotions and  
Social Media Officer  
at Gurteen College



**W**e were looking for an adventure,” says Jon Parry about his family’s move from the UK to his current position as college principal at Gurteen College in Tipperary. As a former dairy specialist, he could be said to be going ‘against the trend’ in joining a college and farm with a strong emphasis on beef and sheep.

“What attracted me to Gurteen was the proud track record of providing education and training to those interested in agriculture and a passion to help them succeed.

“Students, and their future employers, tell us that hands-on learning with quality time spent in the yard at Gurteen, working with our superb livestock makes the real difference.

“All students get a chance to develop skills and work on a wide range of farm enterprises, including dairying, before specialising in their chosen sector. This is why having a top-performing drystock enterprise is crucial in facilitating our student successes.”

The Gurteen drystock enterprise consists of a suckler herd, a breeding

ewe flock, a dairy calf-to-beef system and contract rearing of dairy replacements heifers. Gurteen’s suckler herd is made up of 70 predominantly first-cross Limousin cows from the dairy herd, with calving split between spring and autumn.

Progeny are finished on-site in under 20 months for heifers and below 16 months for bulls. Spring calving begins during the first week of February and lasts 10 weeks, while autumn calving begins the first week of September and lasts nine weeks. Breeding is with a five-star stock bull or via AI.

The dairy calf-to-beef system consists of 80 Friesian, Hereford and Angus calves purchased from the dairy herd at two weeks of age and finished for beef between 18-24 months.

Beef finishing systems last 120 days, and the animals are put on a finishing diet of 25kg grass silage, 5kg of concentrates, 15kg of fodder beet and 0.5kg of straw. Similarly, 60 dairy replacement heifer calves are contract reared from 12 weeks of age until returning to the dairy enterprise as in-calf replacement heifers at 20 months of age.

The sheep enterprise consists of 450 Borris type ewes. The flock consists of 100 early (January) lambing ewes and 350 mid-season ewes lambing in early March. Breeding rams are Charolais and Texel and the aim is to have all lambs sold from grass by the end of September.

Alongside the impressive drystock enterprise, Gurteen also offers students the opportunity to work with its 240 pedigree Friesian dairy herd, 109ac of tillage, commercial forestry, bog, mixed woodland and short rotation coppice willow, making Gurteen a truly sustainable ‘mixed’ farm.

As a college, the most rewarding thing for us is to see the pride and

passion Gurteen students develop as they go on to accomplish spectacular achievements, here are some of our drystock students’ stories.

## Sean Diver

Sean Diver studied the Level 6 in Drystock Management at Gurteen College in 2013, and is now the farm manager on Tullamore Farm, the *Irish Farmers Journal* beef and sheep demonstration farm.

“I chose to attend Gurteen after doing research on the courses they offered, and I was amazed to find the college had such a large scale fully operational farm with so many different enterprises. I felt that by attending Gurteen, I would be exposed to dairy, sucklers, sheep and tillage, receiving education on the areas I am most passionate about, but also experience in two more sectors while there.

“I have great memories of being involved in the day-to-day farming in Gurteen, everyone was encouraged to get involved, gaining a huge amount of experience in all sectors and farm practices, but especially in sucklers and sheep.

“After Gurteen, I took up a job on a suckler and sheep farm. I found the job through contacts made in Gurteen. In the spring of 2018, I responded to a job advert for the role as farm manager on the Tullamore Farm and this is where I work today. Had I not made the decision to attend Gurteen back in 2013, I feel that I would not be in the position I am now.”

## Dr Tomás Russell

Dr Tomás Russell was a student in Gurteen College from 2007 to 2009 on the Certificate in Agriculture and the Advanced Certificate in Drystock Management course. He comes from a beef and sheep farm in Co Offaly, which he currently farms in partner-

This spring, Gurteen sold 24 Friesian steers, with an average carcass weight of 354kg, a KO% of 50.2%, a condition score of O- and a fat score of 3+

Eighty-five of Gurteen early born lambs were sold during April, with an average carcass weight of 19.92kg. All lambs graded U3.



Gurteen College is proud of all our alumni, who can be found all across Ireland! If you'd like to be included on the Gurteen mailing list for our quarterly gazette, contact us today! Email [alumni@gurteencollege.ie](mailto:alumni@gurteencollege.ie)

Passionate to learn more about all the courses on offer? You can visit the Gurteen website or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @gurteencollege.

Teagasc has a network of seven colleges that deliver agriculture and horticulture courses – visit the website <https://www.teagasc.ie/education/> to find out more

Innovation at University College Dublin. My job involves research and teaching. I use the skills, knowledge, and experience that I got in Gurteen every day both at UCD and at home on the farm. I am proud to have studied at Gurteen.”

**Catriona Egan**

Catriona Egan is a secondary school teacher who also farms alongside her family on their suckler and sheep farm in Co Laois. She's in her second year studying on the Gurteen Distance Education course, the Level 6 Specific Purpose Certificate in Farming.

“Gurteen College has played a huge role in my farming life. I found it great to develop connections with other like-minded people,” says Catriona.

“The structured course has been invaluable to me, as I gained both theoretical and practical ‘hands-on’ skills.

“These transferrable skills such as grassland budgeting, animal husbandry and farm planning have enabled me to plan for the future and help to implement sustainable farming practices on my home farm.”

“Gurteen is proud to have continuing successes with its drystock students and prouder still to utilise our fantastic college farm in teaching these students,” says Jon Parry.

“Offering students hands-on experience in all aspects of farming is incredibly important, allowing them to gain the best knowledge and skills to help them succeed in life, whether that’s on their home farms, or elsewhere within our agricultural industry. Contact us today to find out more about starting your own Gurteen adventure!

ship with his father.

“As a child, I had no interest in anything other than farming,” says Tomas.

“Having been convinced by my mam not to leave school after my Junior Certificate, I completed my Leaving Certificate and elected to go to agricultural college.

“Gurteen was the obvious choice for me as it had a top-quality farm and facilities, and the mix of practical and theory classes really suited me. Although it’s close to home, I decided to live on campus for my two years. The life experience, personal devel-

opment, friends (both students and staff), skills and education that I got from Gurteen was fantastic and really impacted on the direction of my life from there.

“Over two years in Gurteen, I realised that I have a huge love for not only farming but also the agricultural industry and decided to go on to the Waterford IT Agriculture course. After completing this, I moved on to study for a Masters in Agricultural Innovation Support in UCD and then a PhD.

“I now work as an assistant professor of Agricultural Extension and