

Performance, profit, protecting the environment

This Waterford family, who are part of the Teagasc Future Beef programme, demonstrate exceptional beef farming in tune with the environment.



Aisling Molloy
Teagasc Future Beef Programme Officer.



Eamon McCarthy and son Donnchadh farm 45.47ha at Glendine, Co Waterford. Their land is in three blocks in the west of the county, on the border with Cork and close to the seaside town of Youghal.

The McCarthy family, which includes Eamon's wife Liz and their two older children, Niamh and Cillian, run 50 suckler cows and are split 70/30 between spring and autumn calving. Males are finished as bulls and at under 16-months, heifers not needed as replacements, at 20 months.

"We've always had a focus on farming as efficiently and profitably as possible, but we also have a keen interest in the environment and we don't want our farming to harm the environment around us," says Eamon, who attended Rockwell College in Co Tipperary, completing the Farm Apprenticeship Scheme and qualifying as a farm manager.

"We like to try and be ahead of the curve if we can. There's always something new to help us make progress, so we were interested to apply to be demo farmers in the Future Beef programme when Catriona (Foley) our Teagasc advisor suggested it last year."



Catriona Foley and Aisling Molloy with Eamon and Donnchadh McCarthy.

The aim of Future Beef is to show beef farmers how they can produce a quality product as efficiently as possible, to farm more profitably and be environmentally and socially sustainable.

Key objectives are to:

- Create more sustainable and profitable farms.
- Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) and ammonia emissions.
- Improve water quality.
- Improve biodiversity.

Farming sustainably

"I believe that being carbon efficient

is the way forward," says Eamon. "Otherwise we can't sell our beef effectively. I believe all beef should be produced with minimal environmental impact. I never removed ditches on the farm as I see a value in them, not only as shelter, but for the biodiversity they contain."

Eamon and Donnchadh are already meeting key breeding targets. All cows are bred using AI so that complementary bulls can be chosen for each cow, based on maternal and terminal traits. The full spectrum of beef breeds are represented in the herd, with Eamon expressing a slight



Catriona Foley and Eamon McCarthy with some of his finishing stock.

inclination to Charolais. Their calving interval is 363 days and they calve 100% of their home-bred heifers at two years of age. The herd produces 0.98 calves per cow per year.

Replacement heifers are checked for myostatin genes through Weatherbys from existing genomic samples and AI bulls are selected to minimise the risk of difficult calvings.

Animal performance is also exceptional, as they are achieving 200 day weights of 307kg for the bulls and 268kg for the heifers. Similarly, the slaughter performance is reflecting this, as the under 16-month bulls averaged 389kg carcass weight, U= grade at 15.4 months of age. The heifers averaged 299kg carcass weight, R= at 20.1 months of age.

“We have been measuring grass using PastureBase Ireland since 2017,” says Donnchadh.

“We aim for cattle to spend a maximum of three days per paddock. We

turn the suckler cows out to grass as soon as they calve in spring, and this year the yearling heifers have been grazing since late January.”

Newer technologies like Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) are employed on the farm and protected urea has replaced CAN as the main nitrogen source.

“We learned about it in detail at a local beef discussion group with Catriona last year. I’m happier using it and it is safer than ordinary urea. I believe we need to take on any technologies that can help us reduce our environmental impact,” said Eamon.

Special Area of Conservation

The McCarthys have 11.7ha of land near Youghal which is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to the presence of various fish, freshwater pearl mussel, otter, salt meadows and other flora and fauna.

This is managed extensively and

receives no fertiliser or pesticides to maintain the valuable habitat for biodiversity. The autumn calvers graze this land over the summer and Donnchadh says that “anything that is in calf will thrive there.”

Eamon and Donnchadh grow 4.6ha of winter barley annually, which is kept for feeding to their cattle over winter in an effort to reduce their carbon footprint.

“It gives us a measure of independence, which we like,” says Eamon.

The farm always had some tillage and a small purpose-built attic grain store from the 1970s, which stores the golden barley before it is rolled on-farm. The straw is used for bedding and manure is spread back onto the tillage ground to recycle the nutrients. There are also 6ac of forestry on the farm, consisting of sitka spruce, ash and sycamore. It was planted over 20 years ago in wet land and provides a valuable biodiversity habitat.

Future plans

As part of the Future Beef programme, Eamon and Donnchadh want to produce their beef at as low a carbon footprint as possible: “We try to be as good as we can, we don’t see the point in being second best,” says Donnchadh.

- They plan to achieve this by:
- Getting better utilisation of their grassland by subdividing more paddocks.
- Making better use of PastureBase Ireland.
- Improving the soil fertility on the farm by following a detailed nutrient man-

agement plan based on recent soil sample results.

- Improving the silage quality on the farm.
- Improve the financial performance of the farm by using the Teagasc cost control planner and completing an annual profit monitor.
- Using ASSAP report recommendations to keep the water quality on the farm at a high standard.
- Reducing the use of dosing products by taking faecal egg samples before dosing.

- Considering the use of clover or multi-species swards to reduce nitrogen inputs on the farm.
- Getting involved in research projects as part of the programme, such as the Pollinator project.

You can keep up-to-date with Eamon and Donnchadh’s progress through the Future Beef website at <https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/beef/demonstration-farms/future-beef-programme/> and through the Teagasc Waterford/Kilkenny social media pages.