

Ed Payne- Setting Up a Dairy Farm for Grazing

Farm: **Ed Payne**

Location: **Tulsk, Co. Roscommon, Ireland**



Background

The history on this farm is one of suckler, beef and sheep farming. In 2009 we made the decision to convert the farm to a dairy enterprise. Today myself (Ed), my wife (Jennifer), my Dad (Jimmy), my mother (Dawn), Manager (Aidan) and extended staff run the farm. Jennifer and I have two young boys, Ben (6) and Aaron (1). We are currently milking 450 cows in two milking platforms supplying our milk to Aurivo Co-op.

Detailed description

We started milking on this farm here in Tulsk in spring of 2011. It is set on an 80ha grazing platform of which 58ha is owned and 22ha is leased. We currently milk 300 cows here with plans to expand this to 320 cows as our grass utilization figures increase.

The cow type on our farms is high EBI and approximately 35% crossbred; we have been breeding for EBI since we started milking and have seen huge benefits in doing so. The future of the herd is to continue breeding for high EBI while we also intend on increasing the level of crossbred animals in the herd and as a result reducing the average weight and size of the herd.

The second milking platform in Ballymoe was developed in 2017 and is now running 150 cows on the 58ha owned block with plans the to go to 200 cows when the reseeding and soil fertility

programme is finished. This is a once a day milking platform for various reasons, none more than trying to reduce overall workload on the farm. We as a family wanted to send as many Kgs of milk solids from this farm as simple and economically as possible. The cows on that farm are mainly the later calvers and lower SCC cows, there are little or no heifers milked on that farm.

None of this expansion past, present or future would be possible without a good strong team of people to drive the business toward its goal. At the moment aside from family labour we work with two full time employees Aidan and Kevin, one of whom is not from a farming background, the other left a career off farm to come work with us. Temporary help throughout the year and our contractors are also key to reducing workload and allow for smoother running of the farm. This in turn allows us to always keep an eye on the future expansion plans of the business.

Results

Improved grassland management has unlocked the potential of not only our land but our cows and people also. We would like to thank our Teagasc advisor Seamus Nolan who has been a rock of sense to us over the years as well as running the local discussion group which Aidan, Kevin and I participate in. We are very grateful to have been awarded this prize as Northern Grassland Farmer of the Year 2017.

Adoption criteria

Grassland management has become a key driver to the business over the past few years since we were exposed to it through our local Teagasc discussion group. We have been aggressively reseeding as much land as we can each year be that on silage or grazing blocks. Soil samples are taken on milking platforms every year and all other land every second year. We measure more than 40 times per year and try to put together as much data as we can to help us grow and utilize more grass.

Future prospects

Our aim is to produce milk from grass. We want to minimize supplementation levels on our farm. The more grass we can include in the diet, the less the cost of production in our dairy enterprise. We hope to be sustainable financially, socially and environmentally going forward.