

Mower trouble



Silage contractors facing huge repair bills **PAGE 22**

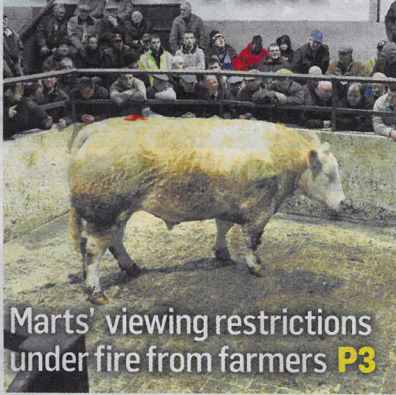
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ANALYSIS

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Darragh McCullough
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Farmers are facing a heatwave meltdown

Grass growth has collapsed in south and east, and fodder shortage fears sparks panic buying

CLAIRE FOX AND MARTIN COUGHLAN

LARGE numbers of cattle are being offloaded and farmers are back feeding stock as the scorching heat has burned off grass growth.

Mart entries in the east of the country were well up over the last week, and prices for plainer stock dropped by €70-80/hd, as farmers reacted to tightening grass supplies by offloading stock.

Threatened water supply cut-offs have compounded the problems on farms that are dependent on public supplies.

Irish Water has warned that nighttime supply restrictions may be necessary to deal with a massive spike in demand. This could force farmers into drawing thousands of litres of water a day for stock.

Grass covers have plummeted across the country, with growth levels in many parts of the south and east

dropping under 30kg/ha/day. This is back 50pc on average growth levels for this time of the year.

Highly stocked dairy and suckler units have been forced to feed additional concentrates and baled silage that was harvested during the growth surge in May to make up for the shortfall in grass.

Joe Patton of Teagasc said there was a real divergence in conditions between the west and northwest and the rest of the country.

While the west received around 40mm of rain for June, well below the 10-year average of 65mm, he said the east was already in drought.

He pointed out that Grange got just 10mm of rain so far in June, compared to an average for the month of 70mm.

With serious soil moisture deficits reported in Waterford, Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny, grass growth has collapsed. Waterford-based Teagasc

advisor Brian Hilliard said grass growth this week was likely to be in the 25-35kg/ha/day range and dropping.

He said farmers were already feeding silage bales and some were even considering opening silage pits.

Dairy farmers and beef farmers are also offloading cull cows and additional beef stock in an effort to reduce demand for grass.

An exceptionally big sale in New Ross on Saturday saw a lot of beef cattle from the dairy herd being sold, mart auctioneer Jim Bushe said.

Big sales were also reported in both Delvin Mart and Kilkenny Mart.

Although mart managers reported a steady cattle trade, Ringside data confirms that prices for plain stock were back 13-15c/kg, or around €70-80/hd.

Fears of further fodder shortages this winter have resulted in a frenzy of forward buying from tillage farmers.

Bobby Miller of the Irish Grain Growers Group (IGGG) said that 8x4x3 bales of barley straw had been forward sold for €44/bale, while wheat straw is making €42/bale.

He said 4x4 bales are generally making €20 ex-field.

Whole-cropping

Mr Miller also maintained that some tillage growers had been approached by dairy farmers to sell cereals for whole-cropping.

Meanwhile, the warm weather is also impacting on tillage crops. Potato crops along the east coast are being irrigated, while many late-sown cereal crops and beans are struggling.

Pat Minnock said late-sown spring barley crops were "short and thin" and the outlook for yields didn't look great.

"How bad is it? Nobody knows," he said.

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Department figures on dairy emissions 'misleading'

THE MINISTER for Agriculture Michael Creed and his officials have under-estimated the rise in emissions from the dairy sector, environmentalists have claimed.

An Taoiseach has called on Minister Creed to correct the record in relation to Dáil statements he made in which he maintained greenhouse gas (CHG) emissions from the dairy sector had increased by 8pc between 2012-16.

Cow numbers increased by 22pc and milk production by 27pc in this period.

"Minister Creed used these figures incorrectly to claim they indicate a large improvement but this is demonstrably untrue," an An Taoiseach spokesperson told the *Farming Independent*.

Citing figures from the Environmental Protection Agency, An Taoiseach says the 8pc rise occurred in total agricultural emissions.

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Older farmers need a Macra-style body to fight their corner

Emotional ties to the land the 'hard issue' for older generation

CLAIRE FOX

A MACRA-style organisation is needed to help older farmers face issues such as succession, says a new study from NUI Galway.

The main finding of the study was that it's emotional rather than economic factors that are the hard issues farmers face when transferring the family farm.

A voluntary organisation like Macra for older farmers would help them remain active within the farming community and reduce the emotional stress around succession and land transfer.

"We recommended a version of Macra because there's nothing specific for the older generation of farmers," Dr Shane Conway who published the study, says.

"It could be funded through membership and government support. It would help to keep them active and involved in what they know.

"It would give them national representation and give them a presence at the top table of agriculture circles."

Dr Conway also believes that an older farmers' organisation could collaborate with Macra na Feirme on succession and other issues.

"Generational renewal is key for agriculture growth going forward but older people have specific knowledge.

"A young person might get a 1.1 degree in Animal and Crop Production from UCD but the older generation have a lifetime of knowledge, so the two organisations could collaborate and learn from one another," he said.

Dr Conway said the study showed that when developing policies around older farmers, it's important the human side of issues are taken in to account.

Control

"Farming is more than an economic activity, it's about emotions and having control over the farm," Dr Conway said.

"Some farmers might have had the farm transferred to them late in life and it's hard to expect them to transfer when they haven't had it that long themselves," he said.

"In the 1970s a study on farm succession was done by Teagasc's Packie Commings and it examined the human side of farm succession and looking beyond the economic issues.

"The 2007 Early Retirement scheme said that farmers must cease all farming activity forever. So you'd a man 40 years ago advocating to look at the

human side and 40 years later the Government come back and are telling you to stop farming activity forever.

"Policy ignores the emotional issues because economics are easier to quantify. You can't put a price on attachment to land. Generational renewal is well and good but what happens to the older generation? The 'soft' issues are the hard issues," said Dr Conway.

The survey found that farmers found it almost impossible to visualise what their lives would be like if they no longer lived on the farm or worked in an agricultural setting.

Dr Conway said that the 19 in-depth interviews he did helped to bring the issues to life. "It really brought the answers from the survey to life because anyone can tick a box. Some cases were upsetting. It's not always easy when you ask a farmers in their 70s or 80s what they hope for the future. Some even said it was nice just to talk," he said.

Dr Conway's study — 'Understanding the Farmer/Farm Relationship in Later Life' — was based on a series of surveys distributed at Teagasc 'Transferring the Family Farm' clinics. Over 300 farmers were surveyed.

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