

IRISH COUNTRYLIVING

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Herself is on the radio...

Mary-Claire Fitzpatrick
and Dymna Little on
their podcast and
culchie influence

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'When "just this once" leads to intimidation of rural families by violent drug dealers'

Editor | Ciara Leahy
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There is a moment that can change everything. When a no becomes a yes, when a sense of experimentation takes over, or when someone finally succumbs to peer pressure. That one moment can be innocent enough – sure what's the harm in trying it this once? But that one pill, that one hit can be the start of a long and complex road with drugs – one that can be utterly terrifying, as Jacqueline Hogge's report on drugs in rural Ireland reveals on page 10.

Because across Ireland, on city streets and in rural corners, the addictive nature of drugs is no longer just the issue. The people behind the drugs – the dealers – are threatening a nation, and as our report reveals, fearmongering and the threat of drug violence has nearly become a more lucrative business for dealers than selling the product itself.

Last Thursday night, Craughwell GAA clubhouse in Co Galway was packed full of people attending a community alert information evening focused on drugs in the area. The true extent of rural drugs, the real-life accounts of men in balaclavas turning up at a young woman's house threatening to kneecap her if her father didn't pay them €10,000 shocked the room. But this meeting could have happened at any GAA club across the country, and there would be stories of a similar nature. Drug violence is making its way down the byroads and side roads of rural Ireland; it's in our GAA clubs and marts.

Farmers are being forced to sell cattle to pay off drug debt and parents are selling land to get the money a child owes. Families feel powerless in their own home – living in fear of a knock at the door. The most shocking story that was referenced by Joe Treacy, HSE clinical addiction counsellor in the article – which I had also heard through others – was of a young person dying and the dealers showing up at the removal. They stood in the queue to sympathise with the family, and then had the audacity to convey the message that the debt did not die with that person. It is incomprehensible that a threat was made at the toughest time in a parent's life.

We can throw the stereotype out the window that drugs only impact those living in lower socio-economic areas. Quite the opposite in fact – young people from affluent and hard-working families are being targeted as dealers follow the money.

This is a story that we will continue to report on because it can't be swept under the carpet. As Joe Treacy says in the report, the drug situation in Ireland is now at an epidemic level. Yet it continues to be discussed in hushed tones. There is still stigma and shame around the subject and families are living this reality in secret. Once the first payment is made, dealers keep coming back for more and families are trying to navigate this impossible situation on their own.

If drug debt is affecting your family, it's important to know help is available. There is a dedicated Garda inspector in every Garda division who will respond to the issue of drug-related intimidation. And perhaps Jacqueline's article is not just an information piece – it can serve as a talking point at the kitchen table. To start a conversation with your child about drugs – not to hammer home a point but to let them know that you are there for them. To help them realise the real danger of an experimental hit. That one hit can change everything.

Ciara



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Country vibes

A few of our favourite things...

Poetry Corner

The First Cut

by Martin Healy,
Mountbellew, Co Galway

The mower roared
to life today,
after months of standing still,
just a patch beside the house,
a small but welcome thrill.

The grass fell clean
beneath the blade,
that sharp and sudden green,
a scent that seemed
to say at once
the change in every scene.

Mam called out
from by the door,
“Mind the corner there,”
the very same familiar words
that follow everywhere.

A neighbour
slowed his car to pass,
leaned out to have a say,
“No stopping now the stretch
has come,”
before he drove away.

It's never loud,
this turning round,
no grand display or show,
just quiet work and
simple signs
that tell you what you know.

The year begins
again like this,
in ways both small and sure,
a field, a path, a cut of grass,
and life returning, pure.

Calling all poets

Do you have a piece of
poetry inspired by the
countryside and farming?
Please send in your best work
for consideration for the
weekly Poetry Corner.

We're looking for short
poems that captivate, inspire
and reflect the landscapes,
traditions, and culture of
rural Ireland in the past or the
present. About 200 words or
so is the ideal length.

Please send your poetry
to icl@farmersjournal.ie or
post to Irish Country Living,
Irish Farm Centre,
Bluebell, Dublin 12.



Picture of the week

Sophie Mannion (1) looking after the
first-born lamb of the season in
Skehana, Co Galway. \Sarah Keaveney



Jazz it up in west Cork

Ballydehob Jazz Festival marks its 20th
edition this May Bank Holiday from 30 April
to 4 May, bringing music, circus, dance and
street performances to the west Cork village.

Expect everything from late-night jazz
sessions to puppetry, markets and a lively
music trail with over 40 free gigs.

Run by the community, it's one of those
weekends that feels as much about the
people as it is about the music.

See ballydehobjazzfestival.org

Pictured above: A scene from
last year's Ballydehob Jazz Festival.

Hop to Emerald Park for an adventure

Emerald Park's Hop and Hunt is back from 2-6 April, with 12,000 Easter eggs hidden
across the zoo and junior zone. Kids follow a trail, collect stamps and swap them for a
chocolate egg, with plenty of games and animal encounters along the way.

New this year is 'Little Bunny Mornings', which offers a calmer, pre-booked experience for
younger children. Entry is included with park tickets from €39.95. See emeraldpark.ie

Pictured below: Sisters Éabha (6) and Cadhla O'Shea (10) enjoying the Hop and Hunt.



A mindful journey

Niall Breslin's latest book *The Place That Has Never Been Wounded* feels like
something to dip in and out of when life
gets busy. Drawing on mindfulness and
his own experience, it gently explores
how to steady yourself in a noisy world.
It's the kind of read you might leave
on the bedside table and return to
often. Published by John Murray
Press and priced at €16.99.

See easons.com

Belle Femme Lingerie: supporting women, one perfect fit at a time

For over 15 years, Bridget Kearney has been helping women discover the difference the right fit and expert advice, can make – including specialist mastectomy and prosthesis services

Bridget Kearney of Belle Femme Lingerie has two golden rules when it comes to bras. “You should never buy your bra where you buy bread and milk, and a bra should never celebrate a birthday,” she quips.

“It’s important for a person buying their standard everyday bra to get fitted every six or seven months. Between menopause, perimenopause, weight on, weight off, we change so much. What I’m trying to do is stop over-buying, get fitted, and come back every six or seven months and re-check it.”

The award-winning lingerie boutique is celebrating 15 years in Kilkenny city this year, and with a second shop now opened in Douglas, Cork, there has never been so many options available for customers seeking expert lingerie advice and fit. Belle Femme Lingerie continues to see demand for its everyday fitting service, and has expanded its offering to fit for mastectomy and prosthesis.

“Some of my clientele over the last 15 years has, unfortunately, gone down the road of breast cancer and prosthesis, and I was never able to give them that service. They wanted to feel like they always had done over the years of me fitting them.

“A lot of women lose a lot of confidence in themselves. I don’t see the difference, because we all have one breast slightly fuller than the other anyway, there’s always a difference in the breasts. We just need to work with you and bring back that feeling of: I feel really good again.”

Learning about bras

In Ireland, women who wear a breast prosthesis, as a result of breast surgery for breast cancer, are entitled to two bras and one prosthesis up to the value of €400 every year. They are also entitled to €150 towards the cost of one swimsuit and one swim prosthesis every year.

“Your doctor will write you a prescription saying that you do need the bras and a prosthesis,” explains Bridget. “Then you bring that prescription to us and we take over from there. Sometimes people can feel that they’re a little bit off-sided, that the bra is not fitting. There’s no need for any of that if you get fitted properly and we get the right prosthesis for you.”

There are key things that we need to learn about our bras, says Bridget,



When buying a bra, you should lift your hands up into the air before leaving a fitting room to make sure the bra doesn’t rise. The bra should sit against the breastbone.

“Buying a bra is as important as buying a pair of shoes. It’s all about the support and fit. When it comes to bras, it’s about lifting the breast and supporting your back, neck and shoulders. It’s about looking after your posture.

“In Belle Femme, we show women the difference between an ill-fitted bra and a properly fitted bra. We educate you.”

One of the unique things about the boutique is that the staff fit without the use of the measuring tape – “that’s what we always specialise in” – which has al-

lowed them to venture into the world of virtual fittings too.

During COVID, Bridget offered virtual fittings and she re-launched the service last Christmas due to the demand. With customers travelling from northwest counties Donegal and Sligo, the service is designed for the women who are not able to get fitted in store.

“We are providing this virtual service for anyone that can’t travel to us but also for the lady that doesn’t have the confidence to come to our fitting room. Over time we will build that confidence from the comfort of their home and hopefully they will eventually come to the boutique to experience the in House fitting,” says Bridget.



Bridget Kearney of Belle Femme Lingerie pictured in her boutique in Kilkenny city; above, bespoke Belle Femme packaging; below, a selection of bras available in the shop and online. \ Claire Nash



In the boutique, Bridget makes the experience as seamless as possible, with big fitting rooms so that you can relax. “I have tears in my fitting room every day of the week when I’m in the fitting room. Women will say: why did I leave this for so long? Why was I so scared of going in to get a proper fitted bra?”

“It’s important to re-educate women that it’s important that we look after ourselves from the inside out.

“I can’t express the difference a bra makes to an outfit and to the person for their inner confidence. It’s for nobody else but yourself.”

All details for the virtual fit are available on bellefemmelingerie.ie

Herself & Herself: common sense, craic and no filter

From culchie influence to modern dilemmas, Mary-Claire Fitzpatrick and Dympna Little on comedy, connection and podcast chaos

By Deirdre Verney

Viral comedians Mary-Claire Fitzpatrick and Dympna Little joke that a level of internet fame means some people recognise them – well, sort of – in everyday life. The duo realised their interactions with the public were often very similar, usually involving someone saying, “I think that’s herself, is it maybe? No, maybe that’s the other one I’m thinking of,” Mary-Claire quips. Those encounters came back into focus when they were thrashing out possible names for their new podcast, and *Herself & Herself* became the obvious choice. Now, just over a month in, the pair are delighted with the reaction to the weekly episodes out every Tuesday on the GoLoud app, where they bring their keen observational humour to the big and small dramas of Irish life. This means it oscillates from light and whimsical stories of a farming childhood to the driving test or meeting Brian O’Driscoll (kinda), all with a hefty dose of nostalgia that is entertaining and funny.

At the same time, the pair have a unique and witty take on heavier topics like Mary-Claire’s recent ADHD diagnosis and Dympna’s grief, following the loss of her beloved mother, Lily, last year. All that really resonates with listeners. While they had met a couple of times, Mary-Claire, who is originally from Rathdowney in Co Laois, and Dympna, from Mullingar in Co Westmeath, didn’t really know each other prior to their podcast – something that is hard to reconcile because they have the easy manner of long-time friends. Speaking to the duo in Marconi House, the home of Bauer Media and Newstalk and Today FM, it’s clear they are enjoying a career opportunity they hadn’t planned (Dympna initially said no to the podcast offer but relented when Mary-Claire came on board and she suggested her as a co-host), and there is certainly a mutual admiration of each other’s comedic chops. “We’re having great fun. I think self-



Dympna Little from Mullingar, Co Westmeath; below, Laois native Mary-Claire Fitzpatrick.



ishly, I’ve been finding it’s a great outlet online because I play characters in a lot of sketches [*@mclwus2laugh*]. I dress up as my dad, so I’m sure Freud would have a field day if he was still with us,” Mary-Claire says, laughing. “I’ve been taking a great leaf out of Dympna’s book, because the reason I think you’re so funny [*@dimplestilskin*] is that you’re so unapologetically yourself, and it’s like you’re FaceTiming your friend. So, I’ve been trying to mimic that a little bit more online by just being myself a bit

more, rather than hiding behind characters.” A long-time admirer of Mary-Claire’s comedy, where she is often playing a dad character on the farm, Dympna says, “She’s so funny in person and just in conversation, very, very natural. She’s a naturally funny woman. Aside from the skits, just in chat.” Asked what they have learned about each other in the short time they have been doing the podcast, Dympna replies instantly that they are “extremely similar, unbelievably similar”. Mary-Claire sums their roles up as “the 80s and 90s versions of each other except I have a few more inches on you, but I suppose I have a few more inches on everybody,” she adds, referring to being almost six foot tall.

Culchie influence

Asked if the culchie or midlands influence plays a major role in that, a chuckling Dympna agrees they are 100% culchies and “both mental”. “If I’m not a culchie, I don’t know who is,” Mary-Claire, who grew up on a dairy farm, fires back quick as lightning. It also shapes the podcast, and to illustrate that, Mary-Claire points out that everything moves at a rapid pace during their conversation. “That’s partly because as Midlands women we speak extremely quickly because we’re trying to get every thought out of our mouths at the same time,” she jokes, adding that in a busy world you should take time out to listen to someone who talks twice as fast as a Dub. Do they see themselves as comedians, we wonder? Mary-Claire replies in the affirmative, telling *Irish Country Living* she does stand-up, appearing at Electric Picnic and the Paddy Power Comedy Festival last year. She describes it as a “confidence booster” and an “instant dopamine hit”, which really helps refine your humour. Her ultimate goal is to write a full show. Interestingly, Dympna doesn’t think she is a comedian. “I am looking into doing the whole stand-up thing though.” Perhaps a *Herself & Herself* double act could provide the avenue, the Laois half of the duo suggests, and you can certainly see the potential of that idea for the future.

Over the years Mary-Claire explains she has started and stopped the comic videos at different stages in a varied career which has seen her complete a law degree in college, have her own YouTube channel, work as a video editor, in social media marketing and as an RTE children’s TV presenter for several years. “The first farming video I made – my dad had asked me to stand in the gap, you know, and he was shouting instructions for me from about a mile down the field, and I had to sort of interpret it. That was the very first one I did, and it went down well. It started from there,” she recalls. While Mary-Claire’s dad is not on social media or doesn’t text, she is very much a digital kid, so it’s not surprising that lots of her videos are about that divide. “When he goes to the local creamery, people might be telling him what I’m up to or my interpretation of what he’s up to, and he gets a kick out of it, but he hasn’t a clue what they’re talking about. I think he’s just

happy I’m doing something with my life,” she says, laughing. She is very thankful that her parents are very supportive of everything she does. **Going viral** A recent video inspired by an incident at her in-laws in Monaghan (who are egg farmers) where an unexpected visitor knocked on the door and was then asked every question under the sun was liked online by Sarah Jessica Parker. For Dympna, who works as a dental nurse, she calls her videos a “hobby that has got out of control”. Initially she started doing them simply to cheer up her beloved mother, who was grieving the loss of her friend. Unashamedly honest, she describes herself as an “open book” and is comfortable talking about tougher subjects like grief following the loss of her mother Lily in 2025. “It’s real. Don’t they say there is comedy in tragedy, and you have to take the laughs

where you can sometimes. Dark humour is a coping mechanism as well. “You can talk about grief and things like that and put a funny twist on it so that it’s not so heavy and you’re still getting the message across. I know people give out about social media, but it’s been very healing for me.” She finds humour in the most heart-breaking of moments, like when her mother, who did everything for her father, started to prepare him for a time when she wouldn’t be there. “So, before she died when she could walk, she’d bring him into Aldi and go, “This is where the biscuits are; this is where you know... What’s more heart-breaking is then they moved the aisles, and he couldn’t find them,” she says, smiling. Mary Claire revealed her ADHD diagnosis online in January in a piece to camera in a bid to raise awareness. It was not about getting a label, she stresses, saying there is more information about how it presents in women now, and there’s a higher ratio of people with ADHD and neurodivergence who gravitate towards creative careers. Things that others found easy were hugely difficult for her, from school to college to the present day. “I know it sounds silly, but I cannot make myself do anything unless I know it’s down to the wire,” she explains of how it manifested, bringing “stress to 90” with

everything done last minute and resulting in burnout. “My thoughts race, and I spiral a lot, and I think about the worst-case scenario, and I talk myself out of things an awful lot,” she adds. “I can only ever do everything at this heightened stress all the time, and it’s trying to manage that and figure out tools and things I can do to work around my brain so that I can make my life a little bit easier and not put myself under tremendous pressure all the time.” In terms of their ultimate goal for comedy and the podcast, Dympna says: “I’d love to give up the day job, and do this full-time. For Mary-Claire, having done so many things in her career so far, she’s just enjoying where it takes her at a great time for females in comedy.

Listen to Herself & Herself on the Go Loud platform or wherever you get your podcasts



Viral comedians turned podcast presenters Mary-Claire Fitzpatrick and Dympna Little pictured on the rooftop terrace of Marconi House in Dublin, where they record the hit podcast *Herself & Herself*.



Paul McElduff walking Duke, a Bernese Mountain Dog, in the fields on the family farm near Killeigh, Co Offaly with views of the Slieve Blooms in the distance. \ Barry Cronin

Paw-some playtime on the farm in Offaly

An unused farmyard area has been transformed into a tail wagging doggy daycare business

By Deirdre Verney

The tongues are out and the tails are wagging. There is a serious game of chase underway involving lots of different canine chums, both little and large, around some very colourful agility equipment which cannot fail to make you smile. If there was a thermometer to measure doggo fun – the mercury would be off the charts as the pooches show off doggy daycare in action at Barks & Barns in Co Offaly.

Once an unused and overgrown part of a second farmyard, it is now an enclosed area home to slides, wooden ramps, agility equipment and paddling pools in the summer for his “canine colleagues”, as dog lover Paul McElduff dubs them, smiling broadly. A traditional stone outbuilding

which would have housed animals in the past now serves as separation areas for dogs who need a sleep or a break from the pack.

While doggy daycare is a concept that is relatively new to Ireland, it is one that is taking off, according to Paul, who opened Barks & Barns, just off the busy N80 road near Killeigh village, close to Tullamore last August.

“A lot of people said I was mad, and there were so many funny comments or whatever, but slowly but surely people have come around to the idea,” which can be summed up simply as pet play, exercise and care while you’re at work or away during the day.

“It varies a lot,” he replies when asked who a typical customer is. “Some people are commuting to Galway or Athlone, and they happen to be passing this road [and will leave their dogs in for the day]. Others come from as far away as Kinnitty

Others who understand the idea just see it as “giving the dog a day out” socialising with other pets, Paul points out.

“Sometimes people take on a dog that is too active for them, but if they come to me, the dog will go home very tired. After a day in Barks & Barns they just sleep,” he jokes, adding that he opens his doors at 7.30am every morning until 5.30pm that evening.

“For many dogs they don’t do much exercise at home, and here is like a playground for them,” observes Paul, smiling as Duke, Teddy and Rosie are “having the craic” on a nearby agility ramp.

Playground

With a rise in those commuting or more being brought back into the office, he says that some people don’t have as much time to give their dog attention and exercise or stimulation post-pandemic. That’s where his service can really help.

“Some people have very active dogs, and they’re busy. They don’t have time to be walking them or giving them what they need. We have some working dogs, hunting dogs coming here or sheepdogs with high energy. If they come here twice a week, they are worn out. There is no hassle with them at home or no behavioural issues,” he explains.

Paul, whose parents John and Breda have 100 cattle on 80ac in the fields behind him, says he loves the work and enjoys getting to know the different personalities of the dogs he looks after.

“It’s great. When Shadow came, he was

quite shy, and he didn’t really know how to play, and he just hid [from the other dogs]. Now, he’s learning and he’s finding his own little friends. It can take a little bit of time though,” he observes.

His customers tell him that their socialisation skills improve and the pooches are far less likely to react to other dogs on their walks after time in doggy daycare.

“Dogs are social and pack animals, so they enjoy being here for the day. The owners keep coming back saying that their dogs seem happier afterwards,” he adds.

The Offaly native sends pictures to his customers of their dog during the day, and he finds they are very invested in their welfare.

“It is a new concept, but I’ve seen it in Wicklow, Dublin and Kildare, and I just figured there are none in this area. It was a risk at the beginning but one that has paid off”

“Dogs are more and more a part of people’s lives and families,” observes Paul, than they were in the past. “For some people, their dogs are their kids,” and he knows the happiness a pet brings to people of all ages.

Having studied hotel management in Shannon, Paul later spent seven years in London working in hospitality before moving back to Ireland. He later went into HR and spent several years working in recruitment before feeling the pull of home and the desire to work for himself.

The skills he picked up in those industries – dealing with people, organisation and customer care – ended up shaping the rural business he has now created.

Room with a view

It made sense to do it on the farm with fewer overheads and build what he could himself – from equipment to a social media presence – to keep his costs low, he recalls. Paul has no regrets in taking the leap to work for himself using the facilities that were already on his doorstep.

“It is a new concept, but I’ve seen it in Wicklow, Dublin and Kildare, and I just figured there are none in this area. It was a risk at the beginning but one that has paid off.

“It’s been brilliant so far. Considering I’m just open [for six months], I’m comfortably making a wage. Before I used to have to commute to Dublin and be on the M50. For me, I enjoy working with friendly dogs every day.

“I can also help Dad out too [on the farm]. He’s been integral to everything I’m doing here. He can build anything, really, and he has helped me loads to keep the show on the road. I’m very happy with it,” adds Paul. He also pays tribute to his mother Breda and girlfriend Lauren for their support. The newest member of the family, baby Hollie, is just three weeks old, and he says it has been nice to be close by to help out at such a busy time.

Initially, when he opened, many people thought ‘daycare’ meant ‘kennels’,



It’s a dog’s life at Barks & Barns doggy daycare facility in Co Offaly. \ Barry Cronin



so he responded to that by kitting out an adjacent building for overnight stays.

That worked in his favour, Paul admits, because doggy daycare is included for the kennel customers, giving something different to a traditional kennel, many of whom come back and buy into the idea after they see how much the dogs enjoy it. Kennel customers also get the benefit of two walks in the fields on the farm framed by scenic views of the Slieve Blooms for €20 a night. The same daily rate applies to doggy daycare.

Looking to the future, Paul plans to keep developing and improving his business with another daycare area in the offing and improvements to the interior areas. He is also starting a course shortly on obedience and search training, which he has already done with his two German Shepherds and also hopes to incorporate into his business in the future. “I think a trained dog is a happy dog and is a much better pet,” he underlines.

Bidding farewell to the tail-wagging excitement of the doggy daycare area, I can’t help but smile at Bear, a German Shepherd; Alfie, a Golden Poodle; Willow, a little Jack Russell; and all of their other canine companions as they swarm around Paul for more paw-some playtime. It’s a dog’s life for sure.

See barksandbarns.com

‘We have a global energy crisis, yet many farmers are denied grants to invest in solar panels’



I believe, thousands of years ago, Ireland used to be covered in rainforest. I think nature is trying to turn us back into one (though maybe this time without the trees). The rain and misery has been non-stop. Last week’s sunshine was a much-needed respite.

With the wet weather, I’ve been keeping the calved cows out as much as I can and leaving a gap open for them to walk back to the yard once they’re finished grazing.

This system is kind of working. There is some damage to the ground, but it’s worth it for the health of the cow and the quality and quantity of the milk they’re producing. On the worst weather days, though, the cows won’t even venture out. They take one look at the weather and say, ‘I think I’m going to take it easy today.’

I have this year’s maiden heifers out on our large silage field. When they were let loose, they were overjoyed and full of energy – I thought they were going to clear the ditch, at one point.

We’re about two-thirds of the way through calving and the shed is filling up with the little tail-waggers. I’m getting a mini-break before our final batch is due. We don’t calve all at once within several weeks like other farms might; we just don’t have the room in the shed. This break provides a bit of work-life balance – I can wean the earlier calves while bringing on the remainder.

In any case, they are all doing great, though there are always some sad times during calving and we did have one calf fatality this year. You always feel angry and frustrated when you lose a calf – you blame yourself for potentially missing something, but most of the time there is very little which could have been done.

Still that one fatality was frustrating, and then to top off that week I received a rejection letter for my solar TAMS application. For those who aren’t familiar, farmers can avail of grants to invest in equipment and infrastructure (called TAMS grants). We had applied for one to help cover

the cost of solar panels, so my dream of becoming a solar baron has been shattered (for this round, anyway).

I had to laugh at the timing – here we are now, we have a global energy crisis. The country will struggle to get the gas and oil necessary to power our economy and what does the Government do? They reject 90% of the solar TAMS applications Irish farmers have spent so much time working on. I mean, you couldn’t make it up.

The average house (with a heat pump) might use 5kWh (kilowatt-hours) of electricity per year. The solar company I spoke with estimated I could get 30kwh of electricity from solar off the roofs of my sheds – that’s a good six houses I could have powered. I have no idea how many farms were rejected, but let’s say it was 1,000. That’s 6,000 homes. It’s such a simple win.

Let’s combine that with the continued negativity thrown our way for not being carbon neutral or ‘green’ enough. Not a week goes by without somebody lamenting about how destructive farmers are. Just these last few weeks there’s been a social media campaign suggesting our butter is somehow tasting and looking different. We are obviously doing some sneaky thing to make the butter lower quality.

“We’re all trying to look at the future of agriculture and see how we can turn waste into positive energy sources for our farms and communities”

I’m always looking at alternative ways to farm. I have a curious mind and I love technology. I recently attended a conference on the growing bioeconomy. I had a great time – not just listening to presentations, but also participating in workshops with scientists, business owners and other organic and conventional farmers.

We’re all trying to look at the future of agriculture and see how we can turn waste into positive energy sources for our farms and communities. There are plenty of opportunities for farmers to take part, or even take a leading role. My only fear is that we’ll fall behind, just as we’ve done in energy security, because of a lack of Government buy-in and investment in the right people.

For years, farmers have been creating energy-rich, high-value products for consumption. Why not trust us to create the energy to power our future?

Farmers forced to ‘sell their cattle to pay off drug debts’

Gardaí and addiction specialists warn an epidemic of drug abuse is causing fear and violence as balaclava-clad gangs threaten parents in their homes to recoup debts accrued by young people



Cocaine has moved from being a problem that was largely confined to more urban areas to become an increasing scourge in towns and villages across the country. \ Philip Doyle

Jacqueline Hogge
Rural



Drug intimidation in rural Ireland has become a more lucrative business for drug dealers than selling their product, according to a senior Garda sergeant who spoke at a community alert information meeting in Co Galway last week.

Sgt Olivia Fleming told a large audience in Craughwell GAA club house that young people across rural Ireland are under huge stress from drug dealers, with gangs wearing balaclavas turning up at their family homes, demanding the repayment of drug debt.

“Decent, normal, hard-working families are being targeted and intimidated to pay off the drug debts of their children and it is heartbreaking to see the effect this is having. It is widespread and it is increasing,” said the Crime Prevention Officer for Co Galway.

“We’ve seen cases where young people are being offered a certain amount of drugs for free, say €100, where they’re encouraged to try it and they think that is the end of it. But these dealers then come back a few weeks later and say they’re owed

€500, which increases to €1,000 and the young person doesn’t know where to turn.

“I’ve seen parents, grandparents, and farmers forced to sell their cattle to pay off drug debts and the problem is once the first debt is paid, these criminals keep coming back for more.

“It’s got to the stage where drug intimidation is making more money for dealers than selling the drugs.”

Cattle drench

Joe Treacy is a HSE clinical addiction counsellor who has spent his entire career working in treatment and addiction services. He told the meeting that the issue of drugs is at epidemic levels where drug use is infiltrating the countryside at ‘an alarming rate’.

“I’ve never witnessed the scale of drug

use as it is right now. Every rural court sitting is taken up with the violence and criminality of drugs and it is showing no sign of abating,” he said.

Figures released this week showed a 5% increase in the number of drug related cases before district courts across the country in 2025.

“The National Drug Treatment Centre has a backlog of 2,000 drug tests waiting to be screened by biochemists who are asking where we have got some of our samples from, such is the quality of drugs being detected,” adds Joe.

“By the same token, most criminals don’t care what is in the product they’re pedalling. We’ve seen ketamine that was cut with cattle drench and the amount of money involved in this whole industry is staggering.

“Young people are ending up with convictions that blight their futures from the ability to travel overseas to future career prospects. The condition and proliferation of drugs we’re seeing in this country is alarming and the age profile where drugs are encroaching goes from 15 to 80 years of age.”

Joe also highlighted the alarming increase of young people being drawn into the drug trade and said dealers were targeting families with known wealth and affluence.

“The ‘muling’ of young people is so disturbing, where teenagers are being used to distribute drugs. The damage to families is insurmountable and I’ve witnessed cases first hand where rural homes are being targeted by drug dealers. These people even appear at funerals, where they will stand in the line to sympathise with mourners, and then remind them that the drug debt owed by the deceased must still be paid. They are brazen and will stop at nothing to get their money.”

Drug of choice

Caoimhe* is 23 and was one of three recovering addicts to speak at the meeting. She lives with her family in rural Co Galway where she is in recovery from drug addiction and alcoholism and shared her experience of the darkest time of her life.

“I had my first drink at 13, which is what all my friends were doing, and then I started to smoke weed before progressing to MDMA and ecstasy before discovering cocaine which became my main drug of choice,” she shared.

“My life was miserable. I was robbing from my parents to pay for drugs which I was using every day. I do not in any way paint myself as a victim but I was vulnerable. The dealers used me to ‘hold drugs’ for them. They gave me cocaine worth tens of thousands of euros and one thing led to another and it was all gone. I had to pay them back.

“I had my first drink at 13, which is what all my friends were doing, and then I started to smoke weed before progressing to MDMA and ecstasy before discovering cocaine which became my main drug of choice”

“They put my photo up on Snapchat offering €500 to anyone who would give them my address. Then one night I was in my bedroom and three men in balaclavas surrounded the house which they threatened to torch, along with our cars. They also threatened to kneecap me, if my father didn’t pay them €10,000. They eventually left, without any money, but when my father came up to me, he was white as a ghost. He didn’t sleep for weeks after that and I wasn’t allowed to see my brothers or my newborn niece, because everyone was terrified and living in fear that these men would come back.”

Caoimhe sought residential treatment



Crime prevention officer for Galway, Garda Sergeant Olivia Fleming; below, Joe Treacy is a HSE clinical addiction counsellor.



A selection of drugs surrendered to addiction counsellor Joe Treacy, a HSE addiction specialist in Galway by his patients.

for her addictions and the help of the Gardai, following the incident.

“I was terrified that because I’d been holding the drugs I would go to prison but the Gardai were so helpful. We didn’t pay a penny to the dealers, if we did, they’d have come back for more but Sgt Fleming came out to the house and advised us on security and we now have CCTV cameras.

“It was such a dark time but looking back I realised I wasn’t a bad person. I was sick and I still am. I’m an addict and I was vulnerable and these dealers took advan-

tage of that. It is so easy to get drugs anywhere in Ireland. I could organise a bag of drugs in 10 minutes if I wanted to.”

Joe says Caoimhe and her family’s experience is being replicated all over rural Ireland.

“We’ve had reports of people going into farmyards and threatening farmers that their sheds and their homes will be burned down if the debt isn’t paid. There is no boundary these people won’t cross.”

He added that while the primary school curriculum is addressing the issue, educating young people on the danger of drugs is not working.

“The current SPHE curriculum is excellent but a child’s intelligence and reasoning goes out the window once drugs come on the scene,” he added.

“Parents are now finding drugs in their homes and they don’t know what they are and they’re seeking screening through urine samples for their children. The demand for that has gone viral.

“There is a huge void in access to treatment, with the number of places available not keeping pace with demand. As of tonight, all treatment centres in this country are full as capacity becomes more limited. We are falling behind in addiction treatment and rehabilitation intervention and the level of funding available from Government is not managing the problem.

“I have gotten into a lot of trouble saying this but it’s Ireland’s professional class that have to take responsibility for creating the demand out there which is fuelling the drugs crisis that is increasing at an alarming rate. Perceived intelligence or status has nothing to do with who takes drugs. The fact remains that a great number of horrific and fatal accidents occur with recreational drug use.”

Targeted by dealers

Sgt Fleming agreed that anyone can be targeted by drug dealers.

“Everyone is at risk; I have three young children of my own and I worry what future lies ahead for them. But the message I want to share tonight is that help is available from An Garda Síochána through the Drug Related Intimidation Programme and we have a dedicated Garda inspector in every Garda Division who will respond to the issue of drug-related intimidation. The help is there, don’t try to deal with this on your own.”

Maggie Ryan, Healthy Club co-ordinator with Craughwell GAA who hosted the meeting, said there had been a lot of positive feedback.

“It was hard listening to what the speakers had to say but it’s essential information for everyone. We need to keep pushing in terms of keeping the conversation going,” she says.

“Parents need to grab this issue now it’s fresh in the mind and we need to run with it. We are delighted at the success of the night and very grateful to Joe Treacy and his speakers who shared their stories so honestly.

“We are very lucky to have huge support from the local Gardai and are thankful too to Sgt Fleming for coming along to share her insights on how people can protect themselves and their families.”



2,000

Drug screen tests outstanding at HSE National Drug Treatment Centre.



15-80

15 - 80 years age demographic of people affected by drug addiction in Ireland.



5,440

Drug related cases prosecuted in the district court system in 2025.

IN SHORT

➔ DRIVE (Drug Related Intimidation & Violence Engagement) is an interagency project with systems and structures to respond to drug related intimidation and associated violence in Ireland.

➔ DRIVE supports those experiencing drug related intimidation and helps communities around Ireland to respond to drug-related intimidation and violence. Further information is available at driveproject.ie

➔ The Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme deals with all cases confidentially and offers advice on drug support services, practical safety information and how to make a formal complaint.

➔ For further information and how to contact your nominated Garda inspector, see garda.ie/en/crime/drugs

Endometriosis – ‘we can’t ever stop fighting for better care’

Irish women with endometriosis are ‘facing up to a decade’ of a wait for a diagnosis, according to experts, leaving many in prolonged agony



Rosalind Skillen
Health

There have been more research studies on male pattern baldness than on endometriosis, a fact which highlights the historic lack of attention that this condition – which affects one in 10 women – has received. The condition is as common as diabetes in women, and can affect women at all stages of their reproductive life.

“Endometriosis is a chronic, inflammatory condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb (endometrium) grows outside the uterus. This tissue is most commonly found in the pelvis, on the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and the surface of the womb. In some cases, it can affect other organs like the bladder or bowel,” explains Dr Alison DeMaio, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist based in Tallaght University Hospital.

“During the menstrual cycle, this tissue behaves similarly to the endometrial lining, swelling at certain times and releasing fluid at others. This can cause pain and inflammation. This response is due to hormone fluctuations that occur naturally during the menstrual cycle.”

The most common symptoms of endometriosis are severe pelvic pain, heavy periods, pain during sex or problems with bladder and bowel function.

While awareness of endometriosis is growing in Ireland, timely diagnosis remains a challenge. Dr DeMaio says that: “On average, it can take eight to 10 years from the onset of symptoms to diagnosis of endometriosis.”

At the end of last year, the Minister

for Health, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, launched the country’s first National Framework for the Management of Endometriosis, which sets out a clinical care pathway for women with endometriosis. The plan includes accelerating the development of endometriosis services in Ireland, as well as facilitating patients to go abroad for endometriosis surgery while domestic surgical capacity expands. Cost of the treatment and basic air/sea fares are covered through the Endometriosis Surgery Abroad Interim Scheme (ESAIS).

To date, the HSE has received just over 20 completed applications for ESAIS. “Nearly half of these have been approved for surgery under this initiative, with just under €20,000 paid and commitments made in respect of the other approved applications,” a spokesperson for the HSE told *Irish Country Living*.

“A small number of ESAIS applications (five or fewer) have been refused. The ESAIS can only support applications for centres that are on the pre-approved list developed by the National Women and Infants Health Programme. When it is not possible to support an application through ESAIS, the HSE engages with the patient to explore alternatives.”

Kerry woman Jean Brassil (48) says that the care and treatment that she requires is not supported in the new framework, as she wants to get her endometriosis surgery in Verona in a centre which is not on the HSE list of approved centres. She describes herself as “one of the women that falls through the cracks of the current measures that have been implemented for the expansion of specialist endometriosis services across the country”.

Jean has a confirmed diagnosis of endometriosis of 63mm throughout her pelvis. “It has perforated my bowels, twisted my bowels, wedged the back wall of my uterus to my rectum, perforated my rectum and causes faecal impaction.”

Jean also has right parametrial endometriosis, a severe form of the disease affecting the tissue around the uterus, which causes intense pain along with



Endometriosis is a chronic, inflammatory condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb (endometrium) grows outside the uterus. istock



Jean Brassil says the treatment she requires is not supported in the new framework; below, Dr Alison DeMaio, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist based in Tallaght University Hospital.



urinary and bowel disfunction, as well as posterior compartment endometriosis, a deep form of endometriosis that affects the rectocervical area and posterior pelvic structures.

“It results in excessive bleeding, painful sex and chronic, debilitating pelvic pain.

In my case, it has caused infertility and I was subsequently told I could never carry a child to term,” she says.

Jean also suffers from nerve compression of the sacral plexus nerves, a network of nerves that provide motor innervation to the lower limbs and pelvis, and that are essential for walking and hip/leg movement. Jean uses crutches for mobility.

Jean was 10 years old when she got her first period and passed out with pain, and was officially diagnosed with endometriosis in London 35 years later in 2023. “It was deemed urgent that I receive an endometrial biopsy to check for uterine cancer,” she says.

The timing of the need for a uterine biopsy coincided with an extended stay for Jean at University Hospital Kerry. She was subsequently diagnosed as viral encephalitis (severe inflammation of the brain) and a suspected glioma (brain tumour).

Jean was treated for an acquired brain injury as a result of viral encephalitis, which “has effectively delayed the urgent care and treatment of endometriosis that I require”.

“I was advised not to progress with surgery for endometriosis until at least 18 to 24 months after diagnosis and treatment of viral encephalitis. The brain needed time to stabilise.

“Throughout my dealings with the acquired brain injury over the last two and a half years, my endometriosis has raged on. I continue to haemorrhage, pass out with pain and walking has become increasingly difficult. From July 2023 with my initial diagnosis of endometriosis to September

2025, my endometriosis has increased by over 50% throughout my pelvis.”

Jean had two consultations with different surgeons on the ESAIS pre-approved list of surgeons, but neither were an appropriate fit for her requirements.

One surgeon said Jean did not need endometriosis surgery at all, and the other is not trained in neuropeleology, a surgery used for endometriosis of the pelvic nerves (which Jean has). The surgeon who identified all the complexities of Jean’s case was an expert in gynecologic oncology and minimally invasive endometriosis surgery in Italy.

“He is absolutely the best surgeon for my care. But my application for ESAIS funding was rejected as he is not on the list of pre-approved centres.” Jean was quoted €22,510 for surgery in Italy, and cannot afford to pay her own surgical and hospital fees upfront.

“Despite the two surgeons on the ESAIS list not meeting surgical requirements, the only recommendation in my rejection letter for ESAIS funding is that I go back to the surgeon who said he didn’t want to take on my case,” Jean remarks.

“As women with endometriosis or suspected endometriosis, we can’t ever stop fighting. We have to question everything and continually push for answers.”

What the surgeons say

Professor Horace Roman who runs L’IFEM Endo, an international endometriosis institute with its main centre in France, is one of the approved centres for endometriosis surgery on the Government ESAIS

list. “I’m very proud to have a government who proposes a partnership [with us] and we take this in a very serious manner. We are able to take care of any patient with complex endometriosis, which is referred by our [Irish] colleagues,” Professor Roman tells *Irish Country Living*. “We’re one of the rare teams in the world where physicians take care of this disease only.”

L’IFEM Endo, which was established in Bordeaux seven years ago, and has since opened centres in UAE, Romania, and India, delivers endometriosis surgery (“we carry out more than 1,500 surgeries a year in endometriosis”) as well as training.

“At the moment, I am training two women [female surgeons] from Ireland. Since 2018, we received 475 surgeons from across the world. We train them in how to manage severe endometriosis.” There are various training options, including a fellowship training where surgeons train for weeks at a time, or masterclasses consisting of one intensive week, followed by certification upon successful completion of the final assessment.

“To be an expert in endometriosis, you have to decide to put a spotlight on this disease more than on other diseases. And once you become expert, your knowledge should be continuously improved.

“Now we have started to train physicians from Ireland and I am sure that people who come here to be trained will quickly reach a high level of expertise. I’m very optimistic about the high-level management of all types of endometriosis of women in Ireland, within, let’s say, five years.”

Dr Abhishek Mangeshikar, a gynaecologist and excision surgeon based in Mumbai, is one of the surgeons who has been trained by Professor Roman. He is the director of the Indian Centre for Endometriosis, and he educates people about endometriosis on his Instagram (@drmangs) where he has amassed over 55,000 followers. Dr Mangeshikar has operated on “quite a few” Irish patients “mostly from Dublin” who come to India for endometriosis surgery.

“It [endometriosis] has perforated my bowels, twisted my bowels, wedged the back wall of my uterus to my rectum, perforated my rectum and causes faecal impaction”

“Very few people do endometriosis surgery, and very few people do ‘bad endometriosis’, bad cases that are very advanced,” he explains. “I think the options become quite limited for patients, and then they have to travel.”

When asked why there is a deficit in the skills to manage complex endometriosis within Ireland, the HSE said that this surgery was typically undertaken by gynaecology oncologists. But as demand for oncology services increased, capacity within these services became increasingly focused on cancer care.

As a result, services for the treatment of advanced endometriosis developed “organically”, according to the HSE. “This



Professor Horace Roman. was led by individual consultants with a professional special interest and expertise in advanced endometriosis surgery, rather than through a formally structured national service.” There are currently approximately 16 consultant gynaecologists with specialist endometriosis expertise working across HSE gynaecology services.

IN SHORT

➤ Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb starts to grow in other places, including your ovaries, bladder, bowel and tummy lining.

➤ It can affect women of any age. The most common symptoms are severe pelvic pain, heavy periods, pain during sex or problems with bladder and bowel function.

➤ Part of the reason why endometriosis has taken so long to diagnose in the past is because there are other conditions that have similar symptoms eg irritable bowel syndrome and urinary tract infections. Society has also normalised period pain.

➤ The Endometriosis Surgery Abroad Interim Scheme (ESAIS) is a scheme to get endometriosis surgery abroad at one of the pre-approved healthcare centres listed on the HSE website. For full details, see [2.hse.ie/services/schemes-allowances/endometriosis-surgery-abroad-interim-scheme/](https://www.hse.ie/services/schemes-allowances/endometriosis-surgery-abroad-interim-scheme/)

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Lifestyle & Culture

Memories made over dinner...

Sometimes you can't beat the simple pleasures in life – a proper roast and a citrus treat to finish



Neven Maguire
Recipes

What a March it has been. I am still recovering from the excitement at the Aviva Stadium when Ireland won the Triple Crown after a fantastic win over Scotland. I was taken there as a guest by my brother-in-law, Donal Murphy, who is married to my sister, Sharon. He treated me to a great three-course meal in the stadium before the match. What an atmosphere there was. I cannot remember anything else like it. Of course, the Scots came expecting to win but there was nothing but good humour and camaraderie from the fans when it didn't go their way. I was back in the restaurant kitchen for the crucial France versus England match and missed the drama of the final kick, but saw a recording later. What a Six Nations and what drama! Earlier in the week Marty Whelan came to Blacklion to do his 7am to 10am daily *Marty in the Morning* programme on Lyric FM from the cookery school. I was delighted to have Marty and his team for dinner the night before in the restaurant. They were very well-behaved with a 6am alarm call in the morning! The team had contacted a lot of local guests including Ken Moffitt, from Thornhill Duck, who is just up the road. His daughter, Isabella, is a good friend of our Lucia and the two girls were fascinated to watch the way a radio programme is made before heading off to school. Then he chatted with Ann Ruden, better known as Aine's Handmade Chocolate, about her Cavan business which she began in 1999. Charlie McGettigan and his guitar provided the music and he told a lot

of stories. Charlie is a very entertaining raconteur. He told us he had been writing some songs with Maxi who people remember from RTE, Sheeba and of course, Eurovision. He sang a beautiful song called *The Outside of your Heart*. What a pleasure it was to have Eurovision royalty in Blacklion. More fabulous music was provided by the girls from the local St Patrick's national school who impressed everyone. My head chef, Carmel McGirr, was also delighted to chat with Marty. He is so good at his job and full of energy. Our front of house team of Christopher McPartland and Gary McGinley had never done a radio interview before and they flew through it. We didn't let the cookery school go to waste and Carmel showed Marty how to make the perfect eggs benedict. Charlie McGettigan had great difficulty controlling his amusement as Marty did his best. It was a wonderful morning and they all stayed on afterwards for a proper feed.

Perfect chicken dinner

Perfect roast chicken is just what the name says. It is one of the nicest meals, and I have many happy memories of my mother, Vera, feeding our family of 11 with roast chicken. Make sure the chicken is at room temperature and do try get a quality assured one. Noone Poultry in Clonmany, Co Donegal farming 120ac are a great option. I think the garlic cloves cook sweeter if left in their skin. A Riesling wine has a nice high acidity for this meal. I always like it with chicken. This Cumberland and port sauce is a traditional English sauce which gives a nice tanginess to the gravy. The lemon bars are a nice afternoon treat served in bite-sized pieces and they keep well in an airtight container. The West Cork Biscuit Company in Dunmanway are worth keeping an eye out for. Folaín near Ballyvourney in Co Cork, make one of the nicest lemon curds that I have ever tasted. For the yoghurt, I always use the 10% fat version. For an excellent Irish cream cheese, look no further than Killowen near Enniscorthy, Co Wexford – I prefer this over just about any other.



Perfect roast chicken with gravy

- INGREDIENTS: Serves 4-6**
- 2 onions, halved
 - 2 celery sticks, halved
 - 3 carrots, halved
 - 6 garlic cloves (not peeled)
 - 1 pack Irish bacon lardons
 - 2 extra virgin olive oil
 - 1.8-2kg Irish chicken
 - 2 tbsp poultry seasoning
 - 1 lemon, halved
 - 50g salted butter, softened
 - 2 tbsp plain flour
 - 1 Irish-made slow cooked bone broth
 - 1 heaped tsp Cumberland and port sauce
 - Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

150ml Riesling wine
Creamy mashed potatoes mixed with cavalo nero, spring onions, (colcannon) and peas to serve

METHOD

1 Preheat to 200C (400F/Gas Mark 6). Get a shelf ready in the middle of the oven without any shelves above it. Scatter the vegetables over the base of a roasting tin that comes with a trivet (a three-legged stand). Tuck in the garlic and bacon lardons and then drizzle over half of the oil. Season generously.

2 Rub the chicken all over with the rest of the oil and then sprinkle with the poultry seasoning, making sure you get it right into the cavity, then stuff with the lemon halves. Sit the chicken on the trivet on top of the vegetables and smother the breast and legs all over with the butter. Place

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Greek yoghurt lemon bars

- INGREDIENTS: Serves 8**
- 2 packets of shortbread biscuits
 - 80g salted butter
 - 1 jar Sicilian lemon curd
 - 2 cartons Irish cream cheese
 - 1 carton authentic Greek yoghurt with vanilla (10% fat)
 - 2 free range eggs
 - 1 carton Irish strawberries
 - icing sugar, to dust

METHOD

1 Preheat the oven to 180C (350F/Gas Mark 4). Put the biscuits in a food processor and blend to fine crumbs. Melt the butter in a small pan or in the microwave and put in a bowl with the biscuit crumbs. Mix well and use to line the bottom of a parchment lined square baking tin pressing down well with a palette knife for an even layer.

2 Put two thirds of the lemon curd in a food processor with the cream cheese, yoghurt and eggs, then blend briefly until smooth. Using a spatula, cover the base swirling around the top. Add small teaspoonfuls of the reserved lemon curd and swirl into spirals with a wooden skewer. Place in a large roasting tin half filled with water and carefully put in the oven for 30 minutes until there is still a slight wobble in the middle. Leave to cool in the roasting tin, then take out and chill for at least two hours or overnight is perfect.

3 Once chilled, using the parchment pa-



Photographer: Philip Doyle.
Food styling: Janine Kennedy.

per lift the Greek yoghurt lemon bake out of the tin and put on a chopping board. Using a sharp knife to cut into bars and wipe it clean with kitchen paper to keep them very neat. Leftover bars can be kept in an airtight container for up to five days in the fridge.

4 Arrange on plates with a mound of strawberries and a light dusting of icing sugar to serve.

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Check out something fishy in Fumbally

1 Seafood with edge, wine with attitude: that's the tag line for this night at The Fumbally Stables in Dublin 8 on Thursday 14 May, and it rings true when you see who's involved. Take one Sebastian Skillings – you might know him as *@TheHungryFishmonger* on Instagram or you come across his informative book, also titled *The Hungry Fishmonger* – add the ebullient Maja Ignaczewska and Maggie Domaradzka from Polish Wine Fest, who make it their mission to showcase contemporary Polish wine culture, winemakers and regional heritage, and round it all off with Irish oysters from Oysome's Sarah De Brún. That's a set up for a night to remember right right there.

The seats are limited and tickets are €80, plus fees. If you're quick, you might also pick up tickets to their fifth Polish



Maja Ignaczewska, Sebastian Skillings and Maggie Domaradzka. *Polish Wine Fest*

Wine Fest which is taking place in the Fumbally Stables this Sunday 29 March.

• See eventbrite.ie/o/polish-wine-fest



A fond farewell to The Tannery

4 The announcement last month by Paul and Máire Flynn of The Tannery that they were going to celebrate three decades of "cooking, craic and hospitality in Dungarvan" in 2026 – before closing on 1 January 2027 – sent shockwaves through the industry. The Tannery, with its lovely, airy upstairs dining room, is one of those restaurants that feels as if it has always been there, a constant delicious presence in the southeast and one that turned Dungarvan into a dining destination from the start. Paul started his cooking career in London during the 1980s, working with Nico Ladenis, before returning to his

hometown and, with his indefatigable wife Máire, opening a restaurant devoted to modern Irish food. It was an ambitious move, and one that the couple doubled down on – twice – by opening The Tannery Townhouse accommodation in 2005, and The Tannery Cookery School three years later. They'll be keeping the Townhouse and Cookery School going but now is the time to head to The Tannery while you can. Their spring break special – two nights bed and breakfast with dinner on both evenings and breakfast each morning is €300 pps or €400 single occupancy.

• See tannery.ie



Step into spring at Lisnavagh Estate

2 Spring has properly sprung at the moment and, while I sit here at my kitchen table typing, I'm itching to get out into the garden, to join the singing birds and get to work in the veggie patch. Every year at about this time I have great – mostly unfulfilled, blame the rabbits – ambitions to grow more of our own food and sometimes part of that itch can be scratched by a close encounter with someone else's properly productive garden. Lisnavagh Estate in Carlow, home to the lovely Bunbury chopping boards – all handcrafted from fallen timber on the 600ac estate – has announced that they're holding a seasonal feast on Thursday 30 April.

The evening will start with a tour of the historic walled garden, led by market gardener, self sufficiency and permaculture teacher Andrew Jordan. He's just the man to get me focused on growing in my own space – followed by a meal of seasonal produce and locally sourced meats from farm-to-fork chef Steve Mercer. While they say to bring your instrument for a gentle live music session around the fire, I'd probably be too busy cross examining Andrew on how to deal with rabbit issues rather than focusing on the tin whistle. Probably for the best for all concerned! Tickets are €55 per person or two for €95.

• See lisnavagh.com

Shout it from Mountain View

3 I've had a pin on my map to visit Mountain View Market in Ballyhale, not too far from Kilkenny city, ever since it popped up during lockdown. Third generation hospitality entrepreneurs, brother and sister Michael O'Neill and Bee O'Grady, set up the popular Sunday food market on their parents' 120ac farm, a space that also hosts weddings and events. It also has a veritable village of bell tents for glamping and an on-site restaurant called The Greenhouse. They haven't stayed in the countryside either, moving into into the city two years ago with Petronella restaurant on Butterslip Lane – in a listed building that dates from 1602 – and the just opened restaurant and cocktail bar Lyla's (lylas.ie) on William Street.

All the food is under the competent



Executive chef Ger Dunne and head chef William Boyle of Lyla's. *Rachel Taylor* hand of group executive chef and Kilkenny native Ger Dunne, a man who has travelled the world as part of the culinary team on the QE2 cruise ship. From accommodation to food, drinks and market entertainment, it looks like you could manage a perfectly good weekend in Kilkenny without ever stirring far.

• See mountainview.ie

Fancy a bockety box of tasty veg?

5 Can you imagine a time when it might be impossible to get any Irish-grown vegetables in the supermarkets? It might be closer than you think. The appointment of a provisional liquidator to Kilkenny-based Hughes Farming Limited – one of Ireland's main carrot producers – has sent shockwaves around the country. We all know that the cost of producing is rising, yet su-

permarket promotions are constantly driving down prices. But at what cost? It's important to look for local at nearby farmers' markets and veg box schemes for the freshest of vegetables. You will pay a premium but it's also an investment to keep those growers in business. If you're looking for Irish-grown veg boxes with nationwide delivery, check out GIY in Waterford, Galway's Green Earth Organics and newbie, Bockety Box.

• See bocketybox.ie



Soup for the soul during stress

When grieving a loved one, we often lose our appetite for most things

Nessa Robins
Home Nurse



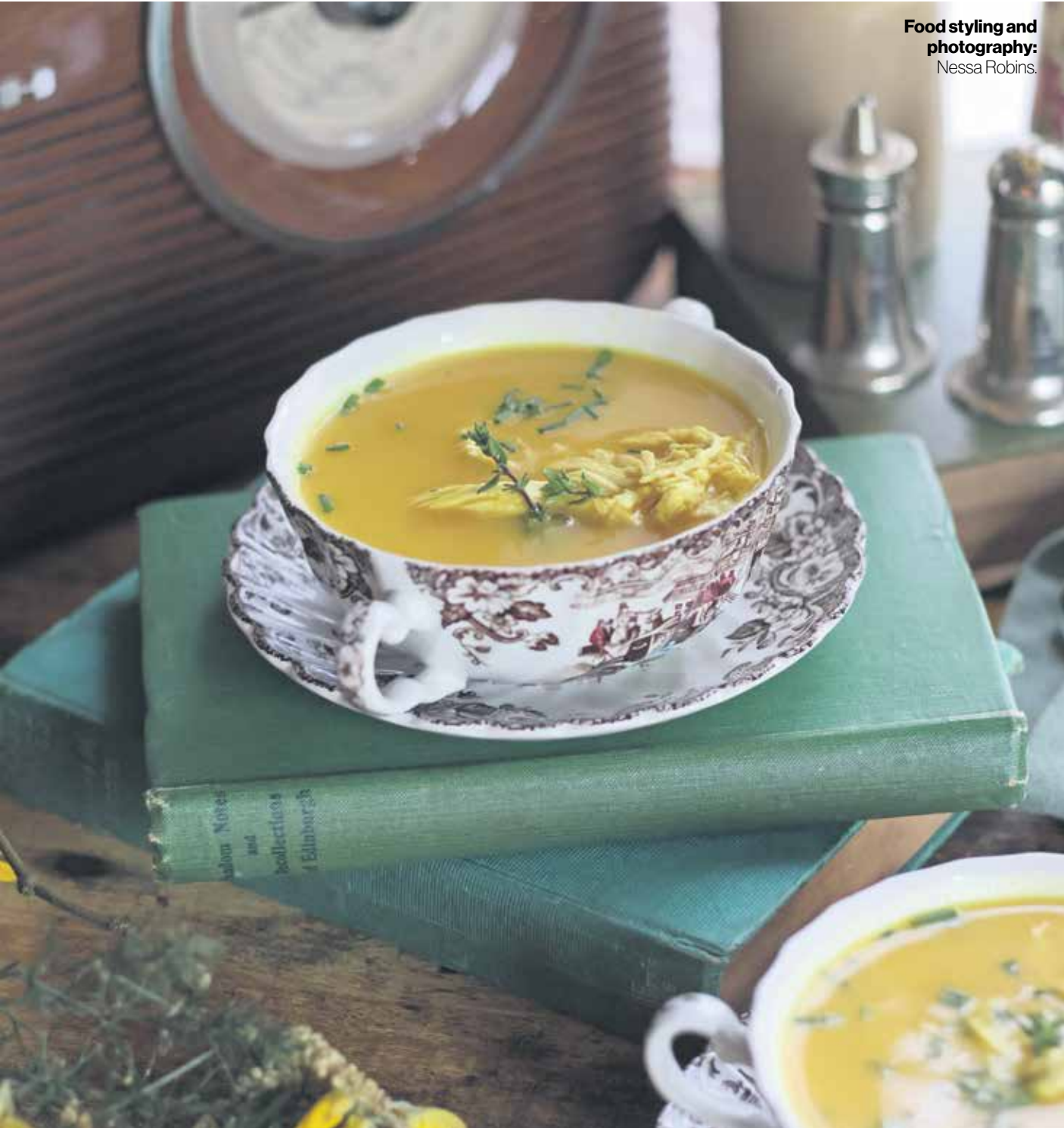
There can be times our appetite wanes, not by a physical illness or ailment but something more profound, something all-consuming and, unfortunately, something which crosses all our paths at some stage or at many stages of our lives. When grieving a loved one, the pain of heartbreak and sadness can be so intense our bodies feel as though they are battling an illness. We simply lose our appetite for most things, and this often includes food.

The sheer exhaustion of the body and mind can be so debilitating when dealing with grief. This is a time we need nourishment and care the most, and even though we understand how vitally important it is to eat to sustain daily life, sometimes sadness or stress can suppress this need.

When approaching how best to encourage our appetite for food, the goal is to include small, nutrient-dense dishes or snacks which are easy-to-tolerate, but also easy-to-prepare. Small, frequent meals can be easier to tolerate in comparison to three large meals. It is best to prioritise easy-to-digest foods like soup, eggs, smoothies and yoghurt. High calorie, protein-rich foods such as full-fat dairy products, and nut butters, even in small portions, will be filling and nutritious. Nutrient-rich snacks such as dried fruit, nuts, fruit-based muffins, or flapjacks are also convenient to have to hand for snacking.

It is important to also keep well hydrated. Water can be best for hydration, but nausea can often hit when the body is stressed, and a herbal tea can be soothing to the tummy while also providing some hydration. When struggling to support an adequate intake of nutrients through food, aim to drink some calories in the form of smoothies or milk, but this is best to do in between meals, as opposed to with a meal.

If a low appetite, for any reason, persists or results in significant weight loss, it is always best to consult with your doctor.



Food styling and photography: Nessa Robins.

Golden chicken soup for the soul

INGREDIENTS: Serves 4

- 50g butter
- 1tbsp olive oil
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 sticks celery, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ tsp turmeric
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 chicken fillets
- 1.3 litres of hot chicken stock

METHOD

- 1 Melt the butter with the olive oil, in a large saucepan over a low heat. When it begins to foam add the carrot, celery, and onion. Stir to combine.
- 2 Cover with the lid of the saucepan. Sweat over a low heat for about 10 minutes, making sure the vegetables don't stick to the bottom of the saucepan.

- 3 When the vegetables have softened a little but not coloured, add the garlic, bay leaf, turmeric, a little salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Stir to combine and add the chicken and stock. Continue to cook for 25 minutes.

- 4 Remove the bay leaf and discard. Remove the chicken fillets to a plate and using two forks shred the chicken and return it to the saucepan.
- 5 Pour the soup into serving bowls and garnish with some finely chopped herbs.



Ginger and lemon tea

INGREDIENTS: Serves 3-4

- 1 piece of ginger, around 5cm in size
- ½ lemon, sliced
- 800ml boiling water
- Honey, to sweeten

METHOD

- 1 Grate the ginger and add to a teapot or cafetière. Pour over the boiling water and steep for 10 minutes.
- 2 To serve, add a slice of lemon to a cup. If not using a cafetière, strain the tea through a sieve, then add a teaspoon of honey to sweeten. Stir and enjoy.



Hazel Nicholl performing a chest opening movement. Hazel is pictured at Wells House and Gardens in Wexford. Patrick Browne

Any chair...anywhere: yoga is accessible for everybody

Chair yoga, which is performed when seated or supported by a chair, is surging in popularity

By Rosalind Skillen

When people hear the word ‘yoga’, they think of contorted poses, downward dogs and sweaty vinyasas. But the physical demands of this kind of practice mean that it’s not for everyone. That is why chair yoga has become such a welcome addition to the yogic tradition, and it has surged in popularity around the country. Performed aided by a chair or in seated support – chair yoga offers all the benefits of yoga, but it can be adapted to suit individual needs.

Hazel Nicholl, the founder of Chair Yoga Ireland, has been teaching chair yoga for about 10 years. She says the practice “has a quiet kind of magic.”

Take a seat

Hazel is based in Ballyedmond, Gorey, and before she became a yoga teacher, she worked as a carer for over 14 years. Hazel regularly practised yoga, but she discovered chair yoga when accompanying some of the service users to a class.

“I went to the class and there was an amazing teacher,” she recalls. “It was just incredible. From the start to the finish, how accessible it was. It’s just so incredible that everybody can do it.”



Geraldine Riley, full-time carer from Newbridge, Co Kildare loves her chair yoga.

“During the class, I thought: this is what I want to learn to do. So that day I finished my shift, I drove around the corner and instantly rang a yoga studio and asked when

the next teacher training was happening. I enrolled straight away.”

Hazel qualified as a yoga instructor and went on to do additional training in ‘Yoga for adults with additional needs’ in London. She then completed specialised chair yoga training.

Now, Hazel delivers chair yoga classes online and in-person for people of different abilities, seniors and carers. She also delivers corporate chair yoga classes in workplaces where she teaches employees how to use their chair throughout the working day to help release tension in their back, neck and shoulders, and reduce stress.

“What happens in a chair yoga class isn’t a watered down version of yoga; it’s yoga distilled to its essentials,” says Hazel. “Breath, awareness, movement, and connection. Even in a seated practice, we draw from the same traditions that have

supported human wellbeing and health for thousands of years. Chair yoga uses ancient practices and adapts them with care.

“It makes us feel great when we move in every direction, but with a chair, you can still do it safely and get movement into every part of your body,” she continues.

Alongside the physical practice focused on mobility, circulation, and cross coordination, Hazel’s classes also feature a lot of breath work and mantras (repeated sounds or words that help steady the mind).

“One of the greatest gifts of a yoga or chair yoga practice is that what we learn doesn’t just stay in our practice. We build ourselves our own wellbeing toolbox that we can use throughout our day.”

“Being a carer and having all of those other responsibilities, you always leave yourself last in the pecking order. You do feel sometimes a bit guilty about self-care stuff and but this was just one that I latched on to”

“If you find yourself really stressed, it’s a really good practice to breathe in and count your breaths. Inhale for a count of three and exhale for a count of five.

“Exhaling longer has so many benefits. When you exhale, it sends a signal that directly triggers a relaxation response within your nervous system.

“Our breath really reflects our state of being. Feelings of uncertainty or indecisiveness can often accompany shallow breathing. So with chair yoga, you start to become more aware of your breath and notice the connection between your breath and how you feel.

“A lot of people are so stressed and busy, and we are often just in our minds the whole time. Yoga is that connection between your mind and your body, and you’re using the tools that you have. You’re using your breath, which is always with you, and you’re using your body, which is always with you.”

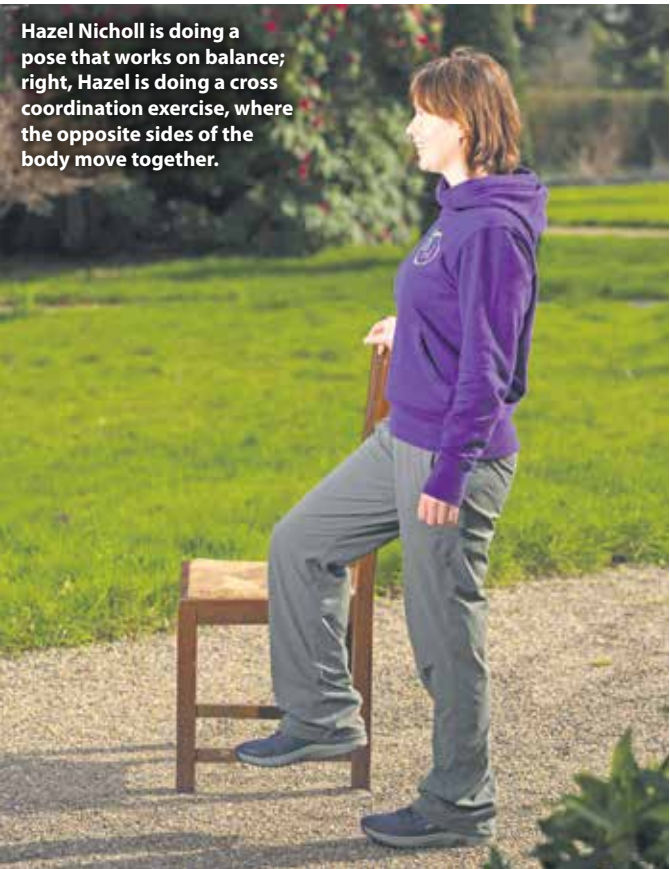
Hazel’s ultimate goal is to set up a chair yoga directory, and map all the chair yoga teachers across the country to make them easier to find. She also will start delivering teacher training from next year. “It’s part of the bigger picture and where I’d like to see it going.”

Caring for the carer

Geraldine Riley, a full-time carer from Newbridge, Co Kildare, has been participating in online chair yoga classes since 2020, initially through a family care support group.

“It’s probably the highlight of my week. I adore it,” she says, enthusiastically. “I absolutely live for it, and particularly during COVID, because I have two children with additional needs, so we were quite cut off during that time.

“Chair yoga was definitely something that I could pencil in during the week,



Hazel Nicholl is doing a pose that works on balance; right, Hazel is doing a cross coordination exercise, where the opposite sides of the body move together.



Left; Hazel is doing shoulder rotations; right, Hazel performing seated mountain pose.



and that was one hour which I couldn’t wait for. It’s continued since that and I still get an enormous sense of excitement and joy from it.”

When Geraldine started chair yoga, “there was a whole heap of people that that were in my life that required full-time care. I was on career break from my job and it was quite exhausting.

“The chair yoga was offered online and that was really important as well, because at that stage, I couldn’t really leave the house. My youngest child was here full-time, and it was hard to go anywhere, it was a two-person role between myself and my husband looking after him.

“Getting the opportunity to do things online was just so much easier. It took the hassle out of being gone longer than was necessary from the house.

“Being a carer and having all of those other responsibilities, you always leave yourself last in the pecking order. You do feel sometimes a bit guilty about self-care stuff and but this was just one that I latched on to.”

Four years ago, Geraldine was also diagnosed with the neurological movement disorder called dystonia, and chair yoga has been a great form of physical exercise for her.

“I wouldn’t be able to do full yoga, but I can do chair yoga because it’s something within my range. With dystonia, balance is a big issue, so I would be quite anxious about doing an exercise where I feel like I could topple over, that’s why the chair yoga is perfect.”

Maureen Haskins is another convert. Maureen, who has used a powered wheelchair for the past three years, started chair yoga at the end of last year. “I was trying to find some form of exercise for myself, and I found chair yoga online,” she says.

“It’s hard when you’re in this chair to get exercise. I did do yoga originally when I was young, so the chair yoga really interested me.

“I am in the chair but it doesn’t limit me.”

Maureen attends an online class once per week. She says it makes a huge difference having an instructor to guide her through the poses.

“At home, you say you’ll do exercise but it’s hard to do it. You need someone to instruct you, and you need the motivation,” she says, with a laugh.

“It’s structured and it’s brilliant, because you’re moving all parts of your body. But you’re also doing the mindfulness, just relaxing your mind and breathing techniques as well. With chair yoga, it doesn’t matter what age you are, you can do it. It’s so accessible to everyone.”

See chairyogaireland.ie

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The magic of Magnolias

Whether shrubs or trees, this flowering plant thrives in gardens, bringing colour, scent and joy

Paul Maher Gardening



Magnolias are survivors from the age of the dinosaur and bring ancient elegance to our gardens today. Their flowers are simple and always beautiful, whether they vary in shape from a goblet or a spidery form. They are planted as small garden shrubs or large parkland trees, so there is something for everybody's taste and space.

Magnolia x soulangeana is probably the most commonly grown in our gardens over many years. It has large upright goblet shaped flowers, creamy white flushed with pink. It grows to a 8m tall tree with the flowers appearing on bare stems heralding spring. *M. sieboldii* is a wonderful spectacle and one of the highlights of the spring or early summer garden.

The flowers are perfectly formed and look like finest white porcelain. They have a central cluster of deep red stamens adding to its beauty. *M. wilsonii* is similar though smaller, growing to 6m. Its flowers are nodding and scented.

Magnolia stellata is known as the star magnolia and a familiar garden plant. It is seen as a bushy shrub growing to 4m high. Its flowers are white and spidery shaped, held in profusion and suitable for small gardens or courtyards. *M. grandiflora* is an evergreen large tree that can achieve over 10m in height, so it is only suitable for large gardens. The flowers are creamy white and perfectly formed, like a work of art and are scented too.

If you are seeking a rich pink colour there are plenty to choose from.

Magnolia 'Star Wars' is tall growing to 5m with rosy-pink flowers that can be as large as 25cm across. It can make a perfect specimen tree with great presence. Equally capable of becoming a specimen

tree of great stature is *M. campbellii* or *M. campbellii* susp. *mollicomata*. They can achieve 30m in height and live for well over a hundred years. The former is early flowering, starting at the end of February, and can be damaged by frost, however *M. campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata* is later flowering and tends to escape damage.

Colour scheme

If it is a richer pink or red that your colour scheme requires, you can cater for that too with Magnolia. It is a colour that is eye-catching and a perhaps seen as a curiosity. *Magnolia* 'Red Emperor' is a small growing tree to 5m producing large pink to burgundy-wine flowers. The beautifully formed goblet shaped blooms are up to 30cm in size and appear on bare branches. *M. 'Black Tulip'* is similar in height, the flower colour is dark burgundy in its goblet shaped flowers.

In some nursery catalogues the flower colour is described as 'almost black'. In bright, spring sunshine these colours are certainly captivating.

Magnolia acuminata, commonly known as the cucumber tree, is large and can grow to over 20m. It makes a stately specimen in a parkland setting. Its flow-



A beautiful flowering Magnolia tree. iStock

ers are variable from greenish-yellow to yellow-orange. It is significant for our gardens today because it is one of the parents of yellow-flowered magnolias.

M. 'Yellow Lantern' has flowers that are light primrose to pale lemon in colour, who appear in April just before the foliage. It is an upright grower that in time can reach 10m.

M. 'Daphne' is an upright grower too, with richer yellow flowers. It will get to a height of 8m given time and is good for smaller gardens. Magnolias are always a welcome sight with their flower, form and colour.

Cultivation: Magnolias are among the most rewarding trees and large shrubs you

can grow. They are long-lived so careful planning is needed before planting. You need to allow the tree develop to its full potential as flowering improves with age.

Moist but well-drained soil is ideal, so avoid areas where waterlogging is likely. The planting site must be prepared well by incorporating well-rotted compost or leaf mould.

Magnolias are happy in neutral to acidic soil. Choose a site that is in full sun or dappled shade and protect them from harsh winds. Magnolias are shallow rooting, so plant where you will not need to cultivate in future years.

If you need to curtail branches, prune in late summer or early autumn.



To-do list

Trees, shrubs and roses: there is still a little time available to transplant trees and shrubs, so choose a dry day for the work. Sap is now rising so avoid pruning of birch or maple.

Continue with rose pruning, remove old woody stems and encourage fresh new shoots.

Apply proprietary rose feed now.

Greenhouse: continue sowing half hardy annuals. Prick off young seedlings but only cater for what you need.

Store seed in a cool, dry area.

Lawn: the lawn may still be wet, however, grass is growing. Plan to mow after a dry day.

Set blades high and use a grass box.

Apply a proprietary lawn fertiliser.

Q&A: Why have my tulips not flowered?

This is the second year in a row that my tulips have not flowered. The first year they were beautiful, but ever since they only produce green leaves. – Audrey, Co Kildare.



Darwin hybrids are reliable bloomers. iStock

This is a common problem and there are several reasons. Firstly, tulips are not guaranteed to reliably flower the second year. In part it relates to our climate today, where we have mild winters and wet summers, but also the varieties that we plant.

Tulips require free draining soil and an open sunny position to make the most of available summer sun. After flowering remove spent flowers immediately and allow foliage to wither naturally.

When choosing bulbs look for Darwin hybrids as they are more reliable to flower from year to year. You should also look at some of the species tulips like *Tulip clusiana* or *T. sylvestris* cultivars as they do well.



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Camogie Association president, Brian Molloy, president of the Ladies Gaelic Football Association, Trina Murray, and GAA president, Jarlath Burns, pictured at the AIB Club Player Awards in Croke Park earlier this month. \Sam Barnes/Sportsfile



The challenges facing GAA merger plan

The 2027 target remains in place for full integration of GAA associations

Denis Hurley
Sport



Thankfully, we look to have moved past the stage where there was some rain every single day in 2026 and there are even moments when we can revel in the warmth of the strange round object in the sky.

Bad weather is of course an occupational hazard in Ireland and can be classed as a mere inconvenience for most of us, but a sustained spell like we had in January and February can be almost paralysing for outdoor sports organisations.

So few pitches and so many teams wanting to use them – being the man or woman who has to say no is not a role that will have a lot of volunteers at the annual general meeting, but it is becoming an ever more essential part of the administrative make-up of a club.

As part of a series of articles on how various Gaelic units around the country were dealing with the meteorological onslaught, *Irish Country Living* spoke to a fa-

cilities manager in one club who outlined that their two and a half pitches were in constant demand for training, from adult down to U5.

Essentially, seniority was used as the determining factor in dividing up the time slots. And, as they were practising the one-club model, the adult ladies' teams were given equal billing with their male counterparts in terms of preference, even though they were operating a comparatively lower level in league and championship.

Such an approach may knock some male noses out of joint but it's an essential mode of operation if the notion of a single unified association is to take root. However, while there are clubs like that one who have taken it upon themselves to move ahead of the curve, the progress at national level remains rather slow, despite the oft-repeated target for integration of the GAA, Camogie Association and LGFA to be in place by 2027.

It was in September of 2022 that we noted in these pages how former President of Ireland Mary McAleese had been recruited to chair the steering group on integration. Given that she had done so much to try to build bridges between nationalism and unionism, surely helping three associations – far more complementary than competitive – to align under the one umbrella wouldn't be too hard.

At the time, we wrote that her appoint-

ment "almost feels like threatening a misbehaving child with the Boogie Man" – if any stakeholders were dragging their feet, they risked being accused of being less reasonable than the DUP.

A year on from that, the same steering committee trumpeted the results of a major survey across the three associations that found that 90% of respondents were in favour of integration while seven out of 10 believed that it would be very positive. That was two and a half years ago and yet

the open door has still not been properly pushed.

Speaking to *Irish Country Living* recently, Camogie Association president Brian Molloy highlighted how there were already plenty of items that had been integrated, regarding Garda vetting, child welfare and coaching education and development.

None of the games themselves will have rules altered to be part of the new, unified Gaelic Athletic Association and so it seems that everything should run smoothly, but of course 'should' is the most subjective of concepts.

There have been roadshows in each of the provinces in order to engage with people. While media attention was drawn to the fact that the one in SuperValu Páirc Uí Chaoimh had just 70 attendees, it was somewhat misleading in that many more logged in online.

However, a question from the floor to the top table, which included GAA president Jarlath Burns, as to how many counties have formed the requisite integration committees – featuring two from each organisation – could not be answered with clarity. It is believed that the actual answer is in single digits.

Unrealistic target

In January, there were media reports that Mary McAleese had been told that the 2027 target was unrealistic – a view she rejected, it should be said, and special Congresses are still scheduled for the autumn, when each association will seek members' approval for the merger.

Between now and then, action on the playing fields will be to the fore and few will be thinking about the red tape that needs to be negotiated.

Burns' time as GAA president will end at next February's annual Congress, where he will be succeeded by Wexford man Derek Kent. The presidency is on a three-year term but each new incumbent is given a year of a lead-in time – taking that logic, one might suggest that integration would need to be in place in all but name for a period before it is finalised.

Kent himself has suggested that it may take until 2034, the GAA's 150th anniversary, for the merger to be fully completed. Let's hope he's erring on the side of caution.

REMEMBERING MICHAEL LYSTER

Seventy-one, the age at which Michael Lyster died last weekend, is a relatively young age to pass nowadays and his family and friends will feel his loss acutely.

However, the Galway native could have died more than a decade ago, having suffered from heart failure in 2012. His great friend, former *Irish Independent* journalist Vincent Hogan, found him collapsed in the hall and his wife Anne carried out CPR to revive him.

A stroke in 2013 and cardiac arrest in 2015 were other obstacles to overcome, but Lyster returned to the presenter's chair on *The Sunday Game* and remained until retirement in 2018, while he also served as an ambassador for the

Irish Heart Foundation.

While I never met Michael, he was – as for so many others – a near-constant presence in my life, anchoring *The Sunday Game* throughout my formative years as well as being a regular on the long-gone *Sports Stadium* on a Saturday afternoon.

As was said of his equivalent soccer anchorman Bill O'Herlihy, it's easy for someone to act like they know more than they do, but it takes an intelligent man to act like he knows less.

He did that in order to be the straight man who allowed the strong characters with the big opinions to own the stage, but he never moderated with anything less than calm authority.

Careers & Business

Compiled by Sarah McIntosh smcintosh@farmersjournal.ie



CONSUMER

How 'skimpflation' is sneaking into Easter eggs



MONEY MENTOR

The right reliefs can help avoid a major tax bill



SCAN ME

Have you made a job move in ag?



Supporting continuous veterinary education

A new centre dedicated to professional development and lifelong learning for veterinary professionals has been launched in Thurles

By Sarah McIntosh

A new centre dedicated to professional development and lifelong learning for veterinary professionals has been officially launched in Tipperary. Premier Skills Institute opened on 6 March at a special event held at the Duggan Veterinary Group headquarters in Thurles.

For nearly 40 years, the Duggan Veterinary Group has grown alongside the veterinary profession. Opening in Holycross, Co Tipperary in 1987, it is a family-owned, Guaranteed Irish and ISO accredited business that is a leading provider of medicines, instruments and consumables to the veterinary market.

"We have grown phenomenally in the last number of years. We anticipate opening two more businesses by the end of this year, connected to the Duggan Group, which will hopefully extend us to over 100 people employed in the local area," says Donal Duggan, managing director of Duggan Veterinary Group.

Although many in farming or animal health may not have heard of the company, if there is an issue at animal health level, they are on the Government speed dial in an emergency to get a product on the market, Donal explains.

"For instance, they ring us and say we need this product, we need a vaccine for bluetongue, or so on," says Donal.

The company also repairs and certifies 95% of TB testing equipment in Ireland.

"We're a cog in that whole process of

testing and identification. We have one of the only few biocidal disinfectants for TB. We supply critical parts of the toolbox for when a disease presents itself," he explains.

Premier Skills Institute has evolved from Duggan Veterinary Continuous Professional Development (CPD) education, which for many years was provided to veterinary professionals across Ireland and the UK.

The newly-established institute now operates as an independent company within Duggan Veterinary Group, with plans to expand its educational reach and develop a centre of excellence for veterinary skills development.

Information is key

"The supply chain is getting shorter, so the end user is getting closer to the manufacturer of the product. There are less people in the middle meaning less knowledge and education. It was obvious to us – be it a vet or farmer or indeed pet owner – that they all needed more information on what was actually happening. How to use the product, the best environment to use it in, the best approach to prevent disease and so on. We created this educational facility about three years ago to facilitate that demand," says Donal.

Last year, they educated or trained in excess of 2,000 people in animal health. There are over 100 CPD courses currently available, from bovine health to advanced surgical nursing, etc. A full list is available from premierskillsinstitute.com.

"There are no options aside from Premier Skills Institute for doing certi-



Brian O'Callaghan, Donal Duggan, Donnacha Duggan, and Conor O'Dwyer from Duggan Veterinary Group with Sarah Keane, Siobhan Killeen and Finola McCoy from Premier Skills Institute.
Tom Ryan Casey

fied postgraduate education [for vets]. They come to us and can do critical injury surgeries and many other things.

"Our premises in Thurles caters best for companion animals and displaying surgical procedures in very small groups. We work in equine and bovine," explains Donal.

"We have between 10 to 20,000 diagnostic tests being taken a month using AI in animal health. That has led to greater conversations [among vets] because they have all the information"

Recognising the need for high-quality, accessible, and practice-ready training, the CPD division was created to deliver education aligned with real-world challenges. The focus is on a diverse range of training formats designed to meet the evolving needs of veterinary professionals. These include on-site courses

delivered at the Thurles training facility, live online webinars, practical training components for Improve Veterinary Education programmes, on-demand digital courses, and private courses tailored to individual practices or organisations.

The launch of the institute represents the next phase of that vision. As an independent entity, it aims to broaden its educational offering and support a wider community of animal health professionals, including veterinary nurses, technicians, practice managers, and future entrants to the profession.

"I think the end game for us is to focus on delivering top-class education training in both Ireland, the UK, across Europe, but more importantly, to the United States.

"The US is going to be a big target market for us in delivering this. There's a type of educational tourism, where we will let people know that you can come to Ireland, only six hours away, spend a week here and do certifications and qualifications," says Donal.

On the increased demand in people who want to study veterinary medicine



Donnacha and Donal Duggan watch Donal Duggan Snr cut the ribbon to open Premier Skills Institute.
Tom Ryan Casey

has been a focus on AI and technology advancements.

"We have between 10 to 20,000 diagnostic tests being taken a month using AI in animal health. That has led to greater conversations [among vets] because now they have all the information [about the animals and the diseases].

"We have four or five different AI technologies either introduced or about to be introduced into the animal health industry. We use AI to learn the solutions and to learn the therapeutic options for the animals when sick within the veterinary practice. It has filled the gaps in the processes or the knowledge base that the vets had," says Donal.

This hasn't replaced any vets; it has just meant they and the pet owners or farmers are getting a higher success rate and more successful outcomes more often because more information is available, concludes Donal.

See premierskillsinstitute.com

in Ireland, Donal says: "The appetite to develop a career in animal health or veterinary has become more apparent to us, as people see not just the typical career pathways that were defined many years ago, but opportunities to go and do different things.

"There are challenges around the number of vets available. There are challenges around the facilities available.

"In some cases, there are challenges around even becoming a customer of the practice." Tackling these challenges there

Surge in veterinary first preferences, but not enough supply

With 80 new veterinary medicine courses coming on stream outside Dublin, there has been a massive jump in CAO interest

By Sarah McIntosh

The total mentions of veterinary medicine courses in this year's Central Applications Office (CAO) has increased by 198% since last year. In all, 2,692 students mentioned it in their application in 2026 compared to 902 last year.

There has also been a 75% increase in students selecting veterinary medicine as their first preference. For 2026, 1,082 students selected it as their first preference compared to 618 last year.

For the first time, students will be able to study veterinary medicine outside of Dublin due to the development of two new programmes. There are now 40 new places in South East Technological University and another 40 places in Atlantic Technological University, but the demand remains much higher than the number of spots available.

Minister for Further and Higher Education James Lawless spoke to *Irish Country Living* about what the increase in preferences means.

"The surge in CAO interest in veterinary medicine this year reflects both growing demand and the new opportunities now opening up for students with the expansion of 80 additional places annually through the development of two new programmes.

"For the first time, veterinary degrees will be available outside Dublin at ATU and SETU, allowing more students to study closer to home while benefiting from modern higher-education facilities and practical training through partner-

ships with Mountbellew and Kildalton Agricultural Colleges, both of whom operate working farms.

"A core aim of this expansion is to strengthen the domestic supply of vets for farms and the wider agricultural sector at a time of recognised skills pressures."

Minister Lawless said his department has worked closely with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to put these programmes in place, so that training capacity matches Ireland's needs in this critical profession.

"These programmes are further supported by substantial capital investment in regional infrastructure from our departments. This investment is creating high quality regional pathways and helping build a sustainable veterinary pipeline for the future, allowing more opportunities for students across the regions to study veterinary medicine here in Ireland," he concluded.

Decline in agriculture

Surprisingly, agricultural science has seen a 10% decline in the number of students selecting it as their first choice, with 303 first preferences for 2026, compared to 337 in 2025.

However, the number of total mentions is up 15% with 1,926 total mentions this year, compared to 1,668 last year.

Taken overall that means the number of students with agricultural science courses selected across the CAO applications has increased.



Vet Laura Schneider showing dog dentistry to TY students at Glen Veterinary.
Claire Nash

Equestrian career off to a flying start for Meath graduate

Tara Carroll, who is taking part in the Godolphin Flying Start programme, on the opportunities in equine

By Sarah McIntosh

Originally from Summerhill, Co Meath, Tara Carroll has no family connection to equine or agriculture. She did, however, have a strong passion for different sports, including football, athletics and horse riding. This meant she spent much of her childhood outdoors.

"I started with horses at a young age, and they quickly became a constant part of my life. I grew up doing pony club, where most weekends were taken up with eventing, tetrathlon and interschool show-jumping competitions.

"As I got older and more competitive, I progressed through Eventing Ireland. Through my early involvement with ponies, my interest in the equine industry naturally developed and it became more than just a hobby," explains Tara.

After finishing school, Tara took a year out before college to gain practical experience in the thoroughbred industry. This gave her a strong understanding of the hours and discipline required in the management of a racing yard.

"I worked full-time for flat trainer Sheila Lavery. This was a huge grounding for me and exposed me to the thoroughbred industry. I learnt to ride out, became familiar with pedigrees and had many opportunities to travel to the races with horses in Ireland and abroad. I was fascinated by all aspects of it.

"One of the great strengths of the industry is the opportunity to learn, work, and travel simultaneously, while also expanding your network and building valuable connections," says Tara.

Knowledge and education

She later decided to further her education and studied agricultural science (equine) at University College Dublin.

"I found college extremely engaging and rewarding. The course offered a strong balance between scientific theory, practical learning, and business-focused modules. As part of the course I completed a placement at Springhouse Farm in Kentucky, USA, working for Spider and Aisling Duignan, which provided valuable insight into the breeding and commercial side of the industry. I had an unbelievable experience. I also attended the Kentucky Derby, Saratoga and Keeneland sales," she says.

During her college life, Tara held roles in clubs including captain of the UCD Equestrian Club and vice chairperson of the UCD Horse Racing Society.

"Following college, I worked as a pupil assistant to trainer Francis-Henri Graffard in Chantilly, France. Here I gained valuable



Tara Carroll pictured at the Keeneland Sales in Lexington, Kentucky as part of the Godolphin Flying Start programme. © Anne Eberhardt Keogh

experience in a top-class racing operation. I had a job with increased responsibility and I was exposed to the management of a large, busy yard," she explains.

Last year, Tara was awarded the Gerry Dilger Scholarship to participate in the Irish National Stud Thoroughbred Breeding and Management course in Co Kildare which further strengthened her understanding of breeding.

"Here I was exposed to mares, foals, stallions, barren mares and more. The programme offered an excellent balance between practical work and academic study, with evening lectures delivered by veterinarians and experienced professionals working at the highest level of the industry.

"I was also awarded the Blue Hen Award for my essay, which promotes research into elite bloodstock, particularly broodmares with exceptional and consistent breeding success," she says.

Godolphin Flying Start

All of these experiences combined have brought her to where she is today on the Godolphin Flying Start programme, an international leadership and management programme that combines academic and practical placements across major racing and breeding jurisdictions worldwide.

"Each year, 12 trainees are selected from different countries, and over the 22-month

programme we complete placements across five countries, including Ireland, England, the USA, Australia and Dubai. The programme covers every facet of the thoroughbred industry. Practical training involves hands-on horse handling and day-to-day involvement in breeding and racing operations," Tara explains.

This is supported by formal skill assessments in horse care and handling, veterinary and farriery, as well as academic modules in equine anatomy and physiology at University College Dublin, and equine nutrition at the University of Kentucky.

"My favourite part of the programme is the variety and level of exposure it provides. No two placements are the same, and the opportunity to work across different countries, disciplines and business models gives a very broad understanding of how the thoroughbred industry operates globally.

"It's also important to address wider perceptions of the industry. Many people are not fully aware of the high standards of horse care and welfare that exists"



Tara pictured at an Eventing Ireland event in Hillcrest; below, showjumping at Millstreet International in Co Cork.



"The combination of practical experience, academic study, and leadership development has been invaluable," emphasises Tara.

For Tara, promoting equine and agricultural careers to young people is essential because she believes many don't realise how broad and diverse the opportunities within the industry are," Tara continues.

"There is often a perception that these careers are limited to hands-on roles, when in reality there are pathways across management, business, breeding, nutrition, veterinary science, education and leadership, both in Ireland and internationally.

"It's also important to address wider perceptions of the industry. Many people are not fully aware of the high standards of horse care and welfare that exists, or of the large number of skilled professionals involved behind the scenes," she says.

Career in equine

Tara's advice to young people considering a career in equine or agriculture is "never stop learning" and expose yourself to all aspects of the industry to gain a deeper understanding of all it entails.

"The industry is full of people willing to help if you are willing to put in the effort," Tara points out.

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Rosalind Skillen
Deirdre Verney

If you want to avoid palm oil this Easter, do not despair. There are great independent Irish chocolate options

You're sitting at the kitchen table, ogling an Easter egg of which you've just taken a generous bite. Suspiciously turning over the broken remains of chocolate in your hands, you ask yourself the question: does this taste less...*chocolatey*? It feels like you're imagining things. But you're not. We are living in the bewildering heights of skimpflation: when manufacturers are cutting corners and replacing the more expensive ingredients, like cocoa beans, cocoa mass and cocoa butter, with cheaper ones, like sugar and vegetable fats. The hope is that consumers notice a price hike before they do a change to a recipe. However, savvy shoppers are becoming more aware of ingredient swaps.

When it comes to skimpflation, the example that many talk about is Cadbury Dairy Milk. A quick look at the back of the 242g Cadbury Dairy Milk Shell Easter Egg (€12) shows that the main ingredients are: milk, sugar, cocoa butter, cocoa mass, and vegetable fats (palm, shea). There are only 20% cocoa solids, which is very low for milk chocolate, and vegetable fats like palm oil are used to replace the dairy fat.

On the egg hunt

If you are planning an Easter egg hunt this year, virtually all bagged mini egg chocolates contain palm oil, including Cadbury Mini Eggs, Terry's Chocolate Orange Mini Eggs, Kinder Bueno Mini Easter Eggs and After Eight Dark Mint Chocolate Mini Eggs. From KitKat to Milkway to Mars, most of the Easter eggs on supermarket shelves also contain some sort of vegetable oil. The Galaxy Milk Chocolate Minstrels Easter Egg (€8) contains more cocoa solids than Cadbury (25% rather than 20%) but their milk chocolate contains vegetable fats in addition to cocoa butter. There is also palm fat.

Lir Chocolates and Lily O'Brien Chocolates are Irish brands that use palm oil in some of their chocolates. The truffles in Lily O'Brien easter eggs contain palm oil, and the truffles in the Lir Guinness Chocolate Rugby Ball Easter Egg (€15) contain vegetable oils (palm, rapeseed, sunflower). "Palm oil is in everything," remarks chef Conor Spacey, who is the director of FoodSpace, a sustainable workplace food company. "And when we look at mainstream chocolate products, the reason it's there is because it basically mimics cocoa. When you add palm oil to chocolate, you



Chocolate maker, Kasha Connolly, advises consumers to look at the ingredient list of the chocolate that they are buying. \ David Ruffles

How 'skimpflation' is sneaking into Easter eggs

can reduce the amount of cocoa fats and cocoa butter that you're using in your chocolate, but you can retain the texture and it is one quarter of the price. And that's literally what's driving this. "They've taken palm oil from where it originally grows and are growing on mass scale. And that then ties into deforestation and climate change and animal wildlife." Chocolate maker, Kasha Connolly, advises consumers to look at the ingredient list of the chocolate that they are buying. "If the first ingredient is sugar, then you're really not eating a lot of chocolate," says Kasha, who runs Hazel Mountain Chocolate, a bean to bar chocolate factory in the Burren that sources their cocoa beans from cooperatives in Ecuador, Cuba, Bolivia and Costa Rica. "If cocoa mass or cocoa beans are on the third or fourth place, you're not going to be eating a lot of chocolate," says Kasha. If you are looking for high quality chocolate, the first ingredient should be



Conor Spacey of FoodSpace Ireland explains that palm oil mimics cocoa. \ Philip Doyle

cocoa beans. "Cocoa solids often relates to the fats as well," she explains. "Our milk chocolate is 42% cocoa beans. It's so pure." If you want to avoid palm oil this Easter, do not despair. There are some great independent Irish chocolate options. Hazel Mountain Chocolate, Grá Chocolate, NearyNógs Stoneground Chocolate, Bean and Goose chocolate, Clo Chocolates, to name a few. Supermarkets also have some options at a lower price point, including the chocolate eggs by Butlers Chocolates which contain 32% cocoa solids (much higher than 20% in Cadbury). Butlers also have chocolate bunnies and chicks which are good for children. The Simply Better range at Dunnes Stores also has a good offering of eggs that don't contain palm oil, including the Handmade Single Origin Colombian Milk Chocolate Egg.

Skimpflation in dairy

Chocolate is just one example of how different categories of dairy products are being pumped with palm oil. Diarmaid Mac Colgáin is the founder and CEO of Concept Dairy, an agri-fin tech platform that offers price transparency and economic sustainability to the dairy supply chain. Diarmaid started posting consumer-related videos on Instagram at the start of last year talking about price transparency for farmers. His following quickly went "bananas", and with a strong 190k followers on the platform, Diarmaid remarks: "It just shows how much the consumer cares about the farmer and how much the farmer gets paid, but also how much they're being screwed over with palm oil going into everything."

Diarmaid makes a lot of videos talking about how palm oil is used as a replacement for dairy fat. "When palm oil replaces the butter, farmers lose out. They lose out because there's less dairy in the product and consumers lose transparency," says Diarmaid. One example, he cites, is Dairygold spread. The first ingredient in a pack of Dairygold spread is cream, the second and third ingredients are palm oil and rapeseed oil respectively. "The thing is that rapeseed oil or palm oil is not bad for you in small doses," Diarmaid explains. "But the volume of it in our systems now is unbelievable."

Creamfields Cheese Slices are another example. In Creamfields Cheese Slices 15 Pack (255g), there is only 22% cheese (milk) in the product. The third ingredient is palm oil. "The reason companies put vegetable fats in cheeses is because it replaces dairy fats. The farmer gets paid less and it's cheaper for them to manufacture. It's a highly processed product with vegetable fats."

The question is: will skimpflation change peoples' eating habits? Diarmaid thinks so. "What's happening is the consumer is becoming more aware." Obesity treatment drugs have also changed the conversation, he adds.

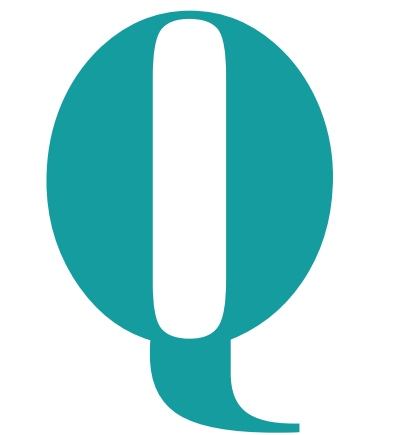
"If you're spending 500 quid a month on your weight loss drug, you're going to be a much more conscious consumer. You're likely going to buy a much smaller bar of chocolate that is of much higher quality."

Has skimpflation altered how you eat? Get in touch with us, icl@farmersjournal.ie

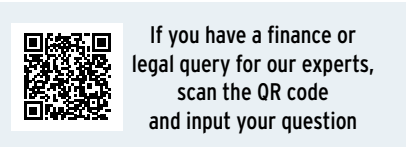


Marty Murphy
Financial Advice

Farm transfers often look complicated, but with the right reliefs and planning you can avoid a major tax bill



I have been farming my father's farm for 20 years. I bought half of it from him at that time, and have been running the place since. Dad is semi-retired but still legally owns the other half. He hasn't been doing accounts for his half. When the time comes for me to take full ownership, I'm worried I'll be facing a big inheritance tax or Capital Gains Tax bill. The whole farm would be worth about €300,000 now. Have I a major problem coming down the line?



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The right reliefs can help avoid a major tax bill



If your father is over 55 and meets the normal conditions, Retirement Relief can eliminate Capital Gains Tax on a transfer to a child. \iStock

ANSWER: You are in a position that is very common on Irish farms. One generation eases back. The next takes on the work. The paperwork never quite catches up. Everything runs smoothly year to year until someone starts thinking about tax, nursing home costs or succession. Is your father still farming? There are a few strands here: The first issue is not inheritance tax. It is how the farm is currently structured for income tax purposes. Your father owns 50% of the land. That does not automatically mean he is farming. What matters is:

- Whose name is the herd number in?
- Is there a registered partnership?
- Are you paying your father rent?
- Who is returning the farm profits each year?

 If you have been returning all the farm income yourself as a sole trader and no rent is being paid, then the position may simply be that legal ownership and day-to-day farming differ. If there is a joint herd number or an implied partnership and your father is technically entitled to profits, that needs to be regularised. Any unresolved income tax position would need to be addressed before a transfer takes place or before an estate is administered. That is the first conversation to have with your adviser. **Remaining half transfers** If your father transfers his 50% share to you during his lifetime, three taxes are considered:

- Capital Gains Tax (his liability).
- Capital Acquisitions Tax (your liability).
- Stamp duty (payable by you).

 On the figures you mention, the total

farm value is €300,000 so the half share is worth €150,000. In genuine family farm transfers, the reliefs are strong. If your father is over 55 and meets the normal conditions, Retirement Relief can eliminate Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on a transfer to a child. On your side, as a child, you benefit from the Group A threshold. Agricultural Relief can also reduce the taxable value of qualifying farmland by 90%, provided the conditions are met. That can reduce a €150,000 transfer to a much smaller taxable figure. Stamp duty on agricultural land is currently 7.5%, but reliefs such as Young Trained Farmer Relief or Consanguinity Relief may apply, depending on age and timing. An inheritance on death does not attract stamp duty. Based on the values involved, it would be unusual to see a large tax bill arise where the reliefs apply. **If the land is left until death** If the transfer happens on death:

- There is no Capital Gains Tax.
- Capital Acquisitions Tax still applies, but Agricultural Relief may be available.
- There is no stamp duty.
- Any outstanding tax liabilities must be cleared before probate is completed.

 From a tax point of view, both lifetime transfers and inheritances can work. The real difference is certainty and planning. **The Fair Deal angle** Another point often overlooked is the Fair Deal nursing home scheme. If your father requires nursing home care, the means test looks at assets in his name. Land that remains legally in his owner-

ship and is not clearly structured as part of an active farm transfer can be treated as an asset for assessment. In certain circumstances, untransferred farmland can effectively be viewed as investment land for the calculation. That can expose part of the value to the annual 7.5% contribution assessment (subject to the scheme rules). Leaving land sitting in the older generation's name can have implications beyond inheritance tax. **Your earlier purchase** You bought your half 20 years ago. That portion is yours outright and is not taxed again. The discussion relates only to the remaining 50%. So, are you facing a major problem? Well, on a farm worth €300,000 in total, assuming the normal reliefs apply, it would be very unusual to see a significant tax liability arise. The bigger risk is not a future inheritance tax bill. It is allowing:

- The income tax position to remain unclear.
- Ownership to drift without a plan.
- Fair Deal exposure to arise unexpectedly.
- Decisions to be forced by illness rather than taken in good time.

 The sensible approach is to sit down now, review how the farm is assessed and decide whether a structured transfer makes sense while everyone is well and able to deal with it. Tax rarely breaks Irish family farms. Delay and a lack of structure often do. *Marty Murphy is head of tax at ifac, the professional services firm for farming, food and agribusiness.*

1. HOMES UNDER €200,000

Outside view of the front of cottage at Dunmore, Falcarragh, Co Donegal.



The hills of Donegal for less than €200,000

A cottage on 34ac and a village home offer different options at the lower end of the market in Donegal

DONEGAL

By Diarmuid Nugent

Moving northwest this week, Co Donegal offers a different picture of what can be found for under €200,000. Lower entry prices in parts of the county means buyers can still access properties with land or coastal proximity – though often with work required. Two homes currently on the market

with McBride Auctioneers in Derrybeg highlight that contrast, from a cottage on a substantial holding near Falcarragh to a detached house in the village of Annagry. A traditional cottage at Dunmore, near Falcarragh, comes to the market with an asking price of €78,000. The property sits on approximately 34ac and includes a three-bedroom dwelling along with a number of outbuildings. The house requires full refurbishment and currently has no bathroom, making it a project suited to buyers prepared to take on significant work. What sets it apart is the scale of the land, which extends around the house

HOME STATS

Price: €78,000.
Address: Dunmore, Falcarragh, Co Donegal.
Grants: Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (VPRG).
BER rating: Exempt.
Transport links: Bus 6km away, Donegal Airport 35km away.
Auctioneer: McBride Auctioneers (074) 95 31666.

and includes a stream along part of the boundary. The holding is laid out in a mix of grazing ground and rougher areas, giving scope for a range of uses depending on a buyer's plans. Properties combining a dwelling and this level of acreage at a low entry price are not often brought to the market. The listing notes the house may qualify for the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (VPRG), subject to eligibility, which could assist with renovation costs. It is located 35km from Donegal Airport while Falcarragh is 6km away for services, including bus links connecting to surrounding areas.

2. HOMES UNDER €200,000



Aerial view of the detached three-bedroom house at Annagry East, Annagry, Co Donegal.

HOME STATS

Price: €195,000.
Address: Annagry East, Annagry, Co Donegal.
Grants: SEAI Home Energy Upgrade.
BER rating: D2.
Transport links: Bus 400m away, Donegal Airport 5km away.
Auctioneer: McBride Auctioneers (074) 95 31666.



Living room; above, front view of the detached house; a garden shed is included with the house.



Annagry East
A three-bedroom detached house comes to the market in the village of Annagry and requires modernisation, offering a more manageable project for buyers not seeking a full restoration. The property sits within walking distance of the village and includes typical accommodation for a family home, with living space arranged over two floors. While some updating is required, it presents an opportunity for buyers to improve an existing dwelling rather than starting from scratch. Its location is likely to appeal to a mix of purchasers, including those looking for a base along the coast or a more permanent home in the area. The living space features a bright sitting room with a fireplace and a combined kitchen and dining area with ample space. The property also comes with a garden shed. Annagry is a Gaeltacht village, with close access to the sands of Carrickfinn Beach – a Blue Flag strand just minutes away and panoramic views of rugged mountains and coastal inlets. Donegal Airport at Carrickfinn is located only 5km away, providing regular connections, while Dungloe is within easy reach for shops and services. A bus stop is also an 400m walk away, offering links to nearby towns. Annagry serves as a perfect, tranquil base for exploring the wild landscapes and priced at €195,000 it would make an attractive option for families, lifestyle buyers, or holiday homeowners seeking a scenic west Donegal location near beaches and community facilities.

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Royal prospect for €995,000 – turnkey ready

MEATH

It's rare that land comes up for sale in the east of Co Meath and when it does, it usually sells well. A 44.7ac non-residential holding close to Stamullen, heads for auction at the end of the month and is guided at €995,000. That guide gives an indication of the quality of land on offer and while it's less than 1km from the heart of the village, this holding at Stadalt is zoned for agricultural purposes. Listed with Drogheda-based Robt B Daly & Son Ltd, the land is all in one block and divided into four similar-sized fields

with mature hedgerows forming the boundaries. Situated a short distance southwest of Stamullen, the land is all in one block and benefits from road frontage on both its northern and southern boundaries. In the southeast corner, there is a four-bay haybarn with a lean-to. Close to the roadside, it hasn't been used for a number of years, but is a potentially useful asset. Auctioneer Peter Flynn says: "There's a few bits of land [that have] come up for sale in the area, but not that much and while this is close to Stamullen, it's very much agricultural land. It's in good order and has been used for tillage purposes for the last 25 years, with a mix of grain and potatoes grown in that time. "This is good land, with a nice slope, with two shelter belts of trees and there is scope to improve the northeast corner of it by draining it. "It comes with vacant possession so the new owner can move in straight away." An executor sale, the auction takes place at 3pm on Friday 27 March in the auction room of Robt B Daly & Son Ltd at 30 Laurence Street, Drogheda, Co Louth. - TOMMY MOYLES



There is an old barn close to the roadside on the southern end of the property; below, the shed has four bays and includes a lean-to; all in one block, the land is laid out in four separate fields.



CO. MEATH

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Lot 2: Herbertstown Lands (South) on approx. 9.5 Ha (23.6 Acres): **Guide Price: €590,000**

Lot 3: The Entire: (Lot 1 & Lot 2) on a total land area of approx. 17.3 Ha (42.8 Acres): **Guide Price: €1,070,000**

- Auction Date: 23rd April (Thursday)
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- Auction Venue: Dunboyne Castle Hotel, Dunboyne, County Meath, A86PW63

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South Kildare land with good access

KILDARE

Coonan Property of Maynooth, Celbridge and Naas is bringing a non-residential holding in south Kildare to public and online auction in the middle of April. Extending to 14ac, the land is in one division and while presently in grass, it is suited to any agricultural or equestrian use. It fronts on to a local road while the River Lerr flows along the north west boundary. Set in a noted farming area close to where Co Kildare shares borders with Wicklow and Carlow, this land could prove tempting to farmers looking to expand their land base. It is guided at €250,000. This farm is conveniently located close to the village of Moone and is just over 2km from the R448 while the R747 road is also within easy reach. Baltinglass, Castledermot and access to the M9 motorway are all within 10 minutes' drive of this fine farm. The auction takes place at 3pm on Wednesday 15 April in Lawlor's Hotel, Naas, Co Kildare and online on the LSL Auctions platform. - TOMMY MOYLES



The holding at Sherrifhill, Moone, Co Kildare heads for auction in mid-April; below, currently in grass, the land is suitable for any agricultural enterprise.



April auction date for Model County non-residential 87ac farm offered in lots

WEXFORD

A prime 87ac non-residential holding with a good yard in Co Wexford heads for auction in early April. Listed with Quinn Property the farm at Garraun Upper, Rathnure, Enniscorthy, is fragmented and as a result is offered to the markets in its entire and in lots. Consisting of free draining soil of the Clonroche series type, it is suitable for any farming enterprise. Most of the land has been used for tillage purposes with a small proportion in grass. There is also a water course flowing along a good proportion of the lots on offer. About 650m from the yard, Lot 1 consists of 22.3ac and is laid out in three fields. Heading east towards the yard, Lot 2 is the largest of the lots at 31ac. This is divided into six fields of various sizes with a small portion of scrub in one corner. The yard and adjoining 5ac are offered as Lot 5. Close to the road, the farmyard contains a range of buildings including a four-bay A-roofed shed that has 36 cubicles and a loose area with a concrete floor. Either side of this, there are a pair of silage pits. There is also a four-bay round roof shed that has a lean-to on each side and alongside this there is a standalone lean-to shed. A dung stead, cattle handling facilities and a pair of stone-built outbuildings are also included in the yard. To the rear of Lot 5, there are 18.1ac included in Lot 4. Laid out in two fields, it fronts on to a local road on the northern side of it, while there are 2ac of woodland at the southern boundary. Lot 3, 11.6ac is the only part of the property that is on the opposite side of the road from the main holding and it is laid out in one field, directly across the road from the yard. All the lots have good road frontage and while this may present the potential for a residential site, subject to planning permission, the properties proximity to a good network means it is easily accessible. Located a few hundred metres from the R731 road that links Rathnure and Killane, this property is 2km from Rathnure village. Enniscorthy is 12 km from this farm, while Wexford town is 30km away and national routes such as the N25 and N30 roads along with the M11 motorway are all relatively close too. This Model County property is guided in the region of €15,000/ac to €17,000/ac. The online auction takes place at noon on Wednesday 8 April on the LSL Auctions platform. - TOMMY MOYLES



A dated but functional farmyard is situated close to the road, giving it good frontage.



Lot 3 is across the road from the yard.

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Lots 1 and 2 are a short distance away from the yard.

KILMACOMMA CLONMEL



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Lough Derg estate for €3.6m

TIPPERARY

Bellevue House and Estate sits above the eastern shore of scenic Lough Derg, with the lake stretching out below it while fields and woodland run back in the opposite direction. The property extends to 200ac, with a further 50ac available, and has come to the market with Sherry FitzGerald Country Homes, Farms and Estates with a guide price of €3.6m, or approximately €18,000/ac. With more than 2km of frontage onto the lake, it reads more like a private estate than a typical residential farm. Dating from around 1750, the house was built at a time when the land was held by the Sadlier family, part of a wider estate in north Tipperary.

Set back from the shoreline with trees between the house and the water, it is a straightforward Georgian building, but with some distinctive details, including a cut stone limestone facade on the main elevation. It runs to over 900 sq m and was restored by the current owner in the late 1990s and early 2000s. That work has left it in



A view of Bellevue House and Estate Coolbaun, Nenagh; above the view approaching the Georgian home; below, a view of one of the lavish living areas in Bellevue House and Estate.



good order without taking away from its age. Rooms are generous, with light coming through from both sides, and there is a sense throughout that the house has settled rather than been recently finished. Behind the house is where the place really begins to open up. The yard is not laid out as a single block but instead

unfolds in sections. Closest to the house is a working courtyard with sheds and stores, before a stone arch leads through to the main stable yard. From there, buildings run in different directions, including coach houses, older stone sheds and what is believed to have once been a bull pen. Some have been brought back

into use, others left closer to their original form. A converted byre now acts as a large open space, with access out to a walled garden where fruit trees and lawns sit behind sheltered walls. It feels like a yard that has changed gradually rather than being designed all at once. From here, the land spreads out in a mix of

grazing ground, woodland and forestry. Around 120ac is in pasture and currently let on conacre, with the remainder in mature trees and hardwood planting. Moving down through the fields, the lake begins to take over the outlook. Along the shoreline, there is a traditional stone boat-house and a small harbour

capable of taking larger boats. Coolbaun village is a short drive away, with Nenagh around 19km for services and transport links. It is 86km to Shannon Airport. Taken together, the house, yard and land feel connected, shaped over time rather than assembled in one go. - DIARMUID NUGENT

To advertise in our Property Section contact:

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T: 087 259 5927
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Grassland holdings will attract attention

CORK

Small to medium-sized non-residential properties in west Cork always get good attention, and John Hodnett of Hodnett Forde Property Services, Clonakilty, has three such farms on the market across the region. All are on sale by private treaty. The largest of them is a 37ac farm at Cashel, Leap. Available in its entire or in three lots, this land is about 2km north of the

N71 road at Connonagh and 7km west of Ross-carbery. Lots A and B, are both 12ac in area and are alongside each other while Lot C, 13.6ac is a short distance away. This holding is guided at €12,000/ac to €15,000/ac. All in grass, the lots have ample road frontage. The most recent of the three to come on the market is a 16ac property at Coolnaconarty, Rossmore, Clonakilty. Located just to west of

the Drinagh Co-op branch at Kilmeen, this land is currently laid out in pasture, with about 5ac reseeded recently. With a mains water supply and electricity, the presence of good cattle handling facilities is an added bonus. This land fronts on to the main road between Clonakilty and Dunmanway and is guided in the region of €15,000/ac to €20,000/ac. Moving east to the Bandon area and the townland of Farranthomas, the third farm is guided in the same price range. Containing 17ac of grassland, it's close to Newcestown village, the land is laid out in two fields. There is an option of an old farmhouse with this land. Guided at €125,000 it is presently under offer. - TOMMY MOYLES



The 37ac farm at Cashel, Leap, Co Cork is for sale in its entire or in three lots; left, the 17ac at Farranthomas, Newcestown, Bandon, has the option of being sold with an old farmhouse; below, the 16ac property at Coolnaconarty, Rossmore, Clonakilty.



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Ratoath 2km, M3 motorway 6km, Dublin Airport 21km

LOT 1 - 17.8 acres | LOT 2 - 41.55 acres | LOT 3 - 21.25 acres
LOT 4 - The entire 80.6 acres

Sols: Anne Kelly, Kelly Hoban Solicitors,
Rye Cottage, Main St., Leixlip, Co. Kildare. Tel: 01 6243624

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Sols: Mr James Morrin, Coonan Cawley Solicitors, Wolfe Tone House, Naas, Co. Kildare. T: 045 899571

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PSRA Number: 003764

Dear Miriam: ‘My sister-in-law is driving me daft about changing my son’s school’



Dear Miriam
Agony Aunt

Q My brother's wife is driving me daft about our sons starting in the same school next September. My nephew is the first-born in that house – but I have an older daughter who has been in this particular school for two years and she's getting on great. But my sister-in-law has decided we should send our sons to another school, which is a 20-minute drive further away and makes no sense whatso-

ever. The boys are in preschool together and are very close – there's only three months between them – but I'm not going to send my fella to a school just because it suits her.

She's now saying this school is known for bullying – which has never come across our radar over the past two years. She's also saying the principal is hard to get on with. I can't say I've had many dealings with him but, on the odd occasion we have spoken he seems very pleasant.

I've tried to explain that she should send her son to whichever school is best for him – as well as the whole family – and that going to different schools won't mean the boys lose contact.

My husband won't get involved as he says it's a ridiculous situation and she will calm down. Which is easy for him to say when he's not getting texts and calls.

I know I need to put a stop to the madness but she just isn't listening.

– *A frustrated mother, Co Carlow*

Dear reader,

Sending a child to school for the first time is such an emotional experience for a parent, as I'm sure you will remember from when your daughter had her first day in primary school.

You say your son and your nephew are very close, and having gone through the preschool phase together, there is an argument for allowing them to continue into primary school side-by-side.

However, one of the most important parts of early education is the ability for children to learn how to build relationships with their peers, which may be compromised if the boys are being conditioned to believe they are 'best friends' at such an early age.

I can understand your sister-in-law's preference for them to go to the same school. What is less clear is why she isn't giving any credence to your experience of the school her niece is attending. But this is a decision for her to make, and she has no right to pressure you into disrupting

your family's routine, just to fit in with her expectations.

Your letter doesn't say how close you live to your brother and his family but I am assuming that due to the fact they attend the same preschool, the distance isn't too great. If I'm correct, then the boy's friendship won't be altered too much if they end up in different primary schools.

Either way, I would have one final face-to-face conversation with your sister-in-law to make it very clear that your son will be attending the same school as his sister in September, and if she chooses to send her son elsewhere, you hope that he will be as happy and settled as your daughter has been since her first day in school. Be firm but friendly in your manner.

Do you have a problem you would like to share? If so, write in confidence to: Dear Miriam, Agony Aunt, Irish Country Living, Irish Farmers Journal, Irish Farm Centre, Bluebell, Dublin 12, or email miriam@farmersjournal.ie

AGRIWORD 1358

COMPILED BY FINÉAGAS

Some clues are cryptic, some more straightforward and some have an agricultural theme

ACROSS

1, 11a & 19a. When you pose with the wagon, then the Welsh cob, that's hardly the right way to go about things. (3,3,4,6,3,5)

6. A British politician's current measures. (4)

10. Rosie replanted this willow. (5)

11. See 1 across.

12. Soar above this piece of motorway infrastructure. (7)

15. A smaller picture placed inside a larger one. (5)

17. Suspend. (4)

18. Encourage, press. (4)

19. See 1 across.

21. Craft in which you quarrel? (7)

23. Historic rent - one tenth. (5)

24. Town in Offaly, formerly known as Parsonstown. (4)

25. Sullen, cheerless. (4)

26. Surviving object of historic or religious significance. (5)

28. Ova brad cooked in a show of boldness. (7)

33. Cube of sweetness. (5,4)

34. Small group of trees, copse. (5)

35. Fine clay or sand deposited by a river. (4)

36. She's yelled out without a thought for the consequences. (10)

DOWN

1. Front row forward in rugby. (4)

2. It shines red, usually - behind a 19 across? (4,5)

3. Silent member of the Marx Brothers. (5)

4. Hawser. (5)

5. Simple, flat boat. (4)

7. Legends. (5)

8. Is 'wee' the very definition of this term of endearment? (10)

9. Cargo. (7)

13. Barring vote. (4)

14. Create a dessert by cooking its stalks. (7)

16. Such musicians may give you - literally - a suit, gratis. (10)

20. Small amounts of moisture from the sky. (9)

21. Is it a heart or a diamond the ref brandishes to dismiss a player? (3,4)

22. Mamma Mia! They were some band! (4)

27. Lawful. (5)

29. Caught with a lasso. (5)

30. Fashion, latest trend. (5)

31. Circuit-breaker. (4)

32. From the domain of Germany to New York? Say it isn't so! (4)

ANSWERS: AGRIWORD 1356

ACROSS 1. Jim 3. Black Beauty 8. Ninety 9. Uncle Sam 10. Loire 11. Tweed 13. Heave 15. Edamame 16. Parlour 20. Scene 21. Robot 23. Tibia 24. Bradshaw 25. Carrot 26. Dunfermline 27 Tie

DOWN 1. Jungle fever 2. Mantilla 3. Butte 4. Crucial 5. Eclat 6. Ulster 7. Yam 12. Dairy cattle 13. Humus 14. Erase 17. Outburst 18. Renewal 19. Obtain 22. Taste 23. Tease 24. Bad

The next Agriword winner will be announced at the beginning of April 2026. All entries received up until then will be entered into the draw for a €250 voucher.

SOLUTIONS: We will publish the solutions two weeks after the crossword publication to facilitate a closing date for entries. Entries for each issue will be closed off after one week and those entries will be included in our quarterly draw. Closing date for Agriword 1358 is Saturday 4 April 2025. **Don't forget to put the Agriword number on your envelope.**

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HOW TO ENTER

Send completed puzzles to Agriword, Irish Farmers Journal, Irish Farm Centre, Bluebell, Dublin 12.

Name: _____

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'Just two colours, black on white, created a rural scene that I would happily frame'

Katherine O'Leary Country Life



As I sat at the living room window this morning, I looked out on a blank canvas. The thick white fog had merged into the low hanging clouds. The white satin curtain started from beyond my son Colm's house and was pulled all the way across to Tower village. The black crows frolicked about, enjoying another beautiful spring morning. Just two colours, black on white, created a scene that I would happily frame.

A second nice day, what a treat. Farm-

ers are well and truly sick of wet, dreary days. The squelch underfoot annoys us. The saturated fields are hard to manage and spring grazing has been a challenge. Cows have been grazing here since 27 January.

They have been guided around the first rotation, picking off the heaviest fields on the occasional dry days. Last week, I worked Tuesday and Wednesday in the calf shed. My brother Phil helped out with heavy lifting and Adam from down the road did his usual jobs of bedding and filling hoppers. I had promised Holly and Riley, the calf rearers, two days off to enjoy St Patrick's Day.

Systems in place

It was exhilarating to be really working. There were three calves born, leaving just 10 cows to calve. It felt so normal and wonderful to be in the shed. My input has been minimal this spring and yet I know that my systems have been continued.

Colm and I have worked hard to make the calf shed functional and the work streamlined. If you have the systems in

place and the communication boards, then it makes it easier for others to pick up where you left off. No farmer knows when they might have to bow out due to illness or injury. It is important to strategise about it. That's good management.

Good employees

We have been so lucky. Colm employed Holly and Riley, who are travelling from Australia. I am so glad that Ireland was part of their itinerary. Neither of them had any experience of dairy farming. They are both professional people. Colm puts a lot of time into sourcing staff and thinking about the future. It pays off.

I had two days with Holly before the pain became intolerable from the tumour under my arm and I had to go to hospital.

We managed a newborn calf and ran through everything in the shed. It was like she tapped her brain into mine and absorbed pretty much everything that I know about calf rearing.

They were guided by Colm and they have been amazing.

I thought I'd be distraught when I

couldn't be hands-on in the shed.

I'm disappointed, but so happy that everything is running smoothly. I can go over when I'm able and change Milton for the teats of the machine or help Holly and Riley to learn more about rearing calves. So, my management role still exists and it's been a really good year. We've had no issues – I'm nearly afraid to say that.

You might remember that last year we had a problem with bloat in calves at around one month of age. A farmer from Wexford got in touch in a circuitous manner to point out that the size of the hole in the teats is really important. It must be circular and small unlike the teats that are fitted to calf buckets and have a cross-style opening. Another advised that the black leg vaccine should be given earlier. We adopted both items and I'm always grateful to farmers who get in touch. We can learn an enormous amount from each other.

Our vets say that there's no scientific basis behind the black leg theory. Nevertheless, we're vaccinating early again this year. If it works, it works.

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