



Case Study No. 2 | Wednesday 14th September | John Lalor Ballyfin, Co. Laois

Supporting Grassland Management through the Greenacres Joint Programme

Summary

The Greenacres Joint Programme takes a holistic approach to building the farmers technical and financial capacity with particular emphasis on grassland management, performance per livestock unit and herd health. Greenacres is a joint initiative between Teagasc, a number of industry stakeholders and ten demonstration farms located in the south midlands of Ireland. Project partners have co-designed a programme that leverages the knowledge and experience of all stakeholders. The programme provides a vehicle for extension at farm level while building capacity amongst all partners involved. John Lalor is a demonstration farmer who is benefiting first hand from the programme whilst at the same time assisting other farmers in their development journey.

The Case

John and his wife Catherine along with sons Matthew, John Clyde and daughter Mary farm 41ha of grass and 48ha of tillage. This family farm is situated in Ballyfin in Co. Laois. This is a very dry farm of land farming heifers only and finishing out of the shed at 22 months of age. They slaughter 100 Angus or Hereford heifers each year. John has become very professional at rearing calves as he bought 130 calves last spring and has 120 yearlings at grass.

Drivers

Grass is the cheapest and most sustainable form of feed in Ireland when properly managed. The challenge is to be able to manage grass and keep quality grass in front of grazing livestock at all times, which in turn helps reduce production costs. Improvements in the quality and efficiency of this feed source result in lower costs and reduced environmental impact. A well-managed paddock grazing system means that the nutritional and forage needs of animals is evaluated, forage quality and quantity assessed, the area of the field that the animals have access to is regulated. Against that background, the objectives of the Green Acres Programme are to:

- Demonstrate that, where a high level of technical efficiency is achieved on beef farms, it is possible to attain a net margin per hectare (excluding premia) in excess of €500 per hectare.
- Advise and demonstrate on 10 demonstration farms, best practice at farm level on the rearing, growing and finishing of purchased dairy bred calves through to beef

(steers/heifers/bulls) on a whole farm basis and to demonstrate the associated economic benefits.

- Provide technical support and targeted training to the technical staff of the stakeholders contributing to the programme.
- Disseminate physical and financial progress / results from the programme using a range of communication strategies including monthly coverage in the Farming Independent, farm walks and other channels of communication.

Activities and Results

- Better growth rates in his animals due to more gain from grazed grass. John has reduced the cost of producing beef on the farm. John joined the programme in 2015 and has set targets to benchmark himself against that will bring his margin over direct cost from €717 per ha to €1000 / hectare by 2018.
- John has reseeded the farm over the last few years as a result of rotating tillage ground. The farm is highly stocked and with a good grassland management system in place, this could be increased further.
- Paddocks were firstly established on the farm in 2014 (paddock grazing is the practice of moving grazing livestock between sub divided fields on a regular basis). Cattle are moved every three days to a new paddock on the farm.
- John is a member of The Laois Discussion Group, The Greenacres Programme. He is also a Teagasc Client and for this receives individual advice from a Teagasc Adviser. There are 18 farmers in the Laois Discussion Group. Twelve farmers participate in the Green Acres Programme and there are 1000 Teagasc farmer clients in County Laois.
- John is a leader who communicates the messages from the Greenacres programme to help other farmers sustainably improve profitability. He receives close support from Teagasc and the other Greenacres partners in return for his time and effort in communicating to other farmers through media contributions and hosting of visiting groups.
- The Advisor learns from their involvement in this multi-actor approach to improving farm efficiency sustainably. The farm is also a demonstration farm for other farmers in the county.
- A range of organisations including Teagasc, Grasstec, Liffey Mills, Volac, MSD and Grassland Agro were important in helping the farmer.



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