ICMSA NEWSLETTER

THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION THAT CONCENTRATES ON SOLUTIONS

€1 BILLION AND COUNTING OF DAIRY-RELATED SPEND DOWN THE DRAIN

WHO'S MILKING WHO?

WHY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE EU NEED TO ACT NOW!

INTRODUCTION

A billion and counting....

John Comer, President, ICMSA

ICMSA is just completing an intensive round of media briefings in which the Association has illustrated graphically, soberly and on a county-by-county basis the cost (so far) of the downturn in dairy prices. We estimate that the downturn, which at the time of writing might be showing the first welcome signs of 'bottoming out' , has cost Ireland's rural economy in excess of €1 billion.The figure has received very wide publicity and concentrated minds on the cost to farm families and the wider rural economy which still rests - despite the wishes of some commentators – largely on the health of our farming and wider agri-sectors. Down through the decades ICMSA has earned its reputation as conservative in its forecasts and calculations – we are not given to crying 'wolf'.That is why when we do place very serious estimates in front of the public – like we have done on this occasion – then a great deal of publicity will focus on them. Our record as serious-minded analysts of the dairy sector guarantees our credibility.

What our analysis shows is that the current period of falling milk price has inflicted very serious damage on the rural economy in general, but has absolutely savaged the farm 'spend' into the wider economy. We are able to measure that farm 'spend' by taking a 2014 representative milk price of 38.4 cents per litre and comparing it to a representative milk price for this year of 28 cents per litre, calculating the fall in direct milk income in each county based on this difference, and then calculating the loss to each county's wider economy based on the 'multiplier effect' recommended by the eminent agricultural expert, Professor Alan Mathews. Professor Mathews credibly calculated that direct farmer income can by multiplied by 1.7 as a measure of its wider benefit to the surrounding rural economy. When that very conservative multiplier is factored-in to the estimated loss to individual counties through falling milk price, then the full extent of the damage is revealed.

We expect that just Cork – which accounts for a quarter of all the milk produced in the state - will see a drop in spending of in excess of €263 million through direct reduction in milk price and the multiplier effect that sees that milk price spent in local communities. Tipperary will see a fall of probably €111 million. Limerick will probably be down about €85 million. Kerry will be down by nearly €78 million and Kilkenny around €57 million. As we have repeatedly pointed out in newspapers and on radio throughout the state, this isn't 'income-falling' territory anymore, in many cases this is 'income-disappearance' territory. It is, moreover, 'income-disappearance' for the milk suppliers with measurable and very destructive knock-on effects for their local rural economies.

What's even more frustrating from an ICMSA point-of-view is the non-interference policy that seems to be order of the day as far as the Government and the EU Commission is concerned. An Emergency Farm Council Meeting was scheduled for September 7. But it was announced at the end of July, seven weeks ago. What kind of emergency is that? The Commission has simply sleepwalked the EU's dairy sector into this situation and we still see no perceptible signal that they understand either the scale or nature of the price fall. Instead of coherent and effective response we're just seeing a kind of shoulder-shrugging and an attitude of 'shure they'll come back up again at some stage' which we don't think is any kind of policy at all.

But the Commission and Government are not the only ones to blame for the disappearance of dairy farmer income. The Processors and Co-ops have some questions to answer. Such as how they (and our policymakers) imagine that our critically important dairy primary producers can survive going forward on the basis of the kind of income volatility that can see an average dairy farm family's income go up and down by €35,000 or €40,000 from year to year?

Insult is added to injury when we learned that, as and from Monday August 17, Aldi and Lidl have promised UK farmers to pay £0.28 pence per litre for milk. ICMSA immediately challenged these extremely profitable companies to issue a similar commitment in respect of their Irish suppliers and we shall monitor very carefully their response. It's worth noting that the £0.28 pence per litre UK price would translate to a price of the order of 38 cents per litre in Ireland, a figure, which was some 10 cents per litre more than most Irish milk suppliers are currently receiving and considerably more than Irish liquid milk producers are receiving. How can these discount giants differentiate between Irish and British suppliers in terms of what they will pay as a minimum price? And if Aldi and Lidl can casually commit to pay a price equivalent to 38 cents per litre to their UK milk suppliers then why cannot Dunnes, Supervalu and Tesco do something similar here?

Milk price to farmers has fallen by about 35% in a year but hasn't fallen to the consumer by a single cent. There's no mystery about what happened in this case: the retail multiples have simply 'gobbled up' the farmers' margins and are now in the position where they seem happy to watch milk suppliers actually losing money on producing the milk on which they - the supermarkets - are now taking an even bigger margin. This is a grossly unfair system that's gone on for far too long and which is steadily wiping out Europe's indigenous family farm system and the community-based, sustainable model of farm that system guarantees. Whether farmer milk price goes up or down, the retailers' margins are completely 'bricked-off' from the market volatility that we have to confront every day. They seem to be able to operate by casino rules – The House always wins. The disgrace is that they have been permitted to do so.

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Free Text and Email Service

ICMSA provides a FREE text and email service to members. If you would like to receive email alerts please contact Linda on: 061 314 677 or email: info@icmsa.ie with your email and/or mobile phone number.

ICMSA Head Office
John Feely House, Dublin Rd, Limerick
Tel: 061 314 532/314 677
Fax: 061 315 737
Email: info@icmsa.ie
Web: www.icmsa.ie
Publishers: IFP Media, 31 Deansgrange Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.
Tel: 01 289 3305 • **Fax:** 01 289 6406
• www.ifpmedia.com

Dairy markets – A surplus of supply and a shortage of sensible policy

By Pat McCormack, Deputy President and Chairperson of Dairy Committee

Dairy markets have struggled over the summer of 2015 and this weak market looks set to continue for the autumn and potentially for the remainder of the year. This article looks to cover the market from an international perspective before looking to see how these markets will feed into the farm gate prices received by you, the member, in the coming months.

On the international markets, prices have been falling steadily since early 2014, with a slight increase in the spring of 2015. This increase was somewhat of a false dawn driven by the perception that a drought in New Zealand would have a serious effect on their seasonal supply. However, it was quickly dismissed as the drought never materialised and New Zealand added an extra 2.8% of milk over the course of their season. The extra supply on the world market is the major fundamental behind the continued price fall on world markets. As seen in Table 1, the major producing blocks of the US, EU and New Zealand have consistently increased supply in the last two seasons and are currently continuing that trend. Milk production in the US increased by 0.7% in June 2015, meaning a cumulated increase of 1.6% in the year. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has slightly raised the 2015 milk supply projection, but remains close to +1.35% adding to the trend. At world level, milk production increased by about 0.69% in the first five months of the year, mainly due to this US increase.

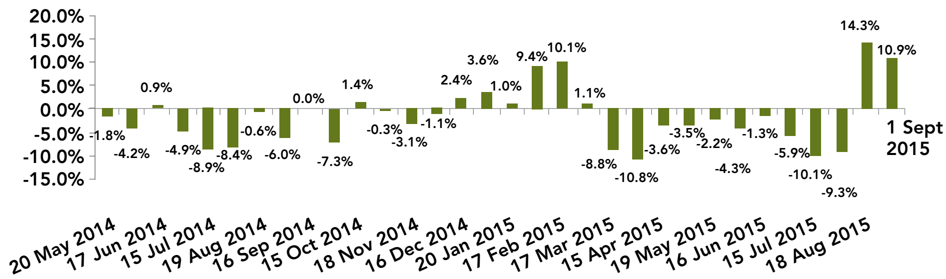
This continued surge in supply has had knock-on effects on stocks of dairy products. EU stock levels, based on a residual approach (production + imports – consumption and exports), confirmed excessive stocks for cheese, higher skimmed milk powder (SMP) stocks and slightly excessive stocks for butter, due to the need to process peak milk production. This overhang will have to reduce before price can trend back upwards.

On the demand side, which is the other key determinant of price, we see that global demand is still affected by the relatively weak demand in China and the Russian embargo which has been extended for another year. Buyers in many other major importing regions (Asia, Middle East and Africa) seem to be well covered and as a result, demand is slow. However, a positive note is seen in the strong domestic demand in the US which has reduced export availability. To stabilise prices in the short term, there needs to be a supply-side correction such as a bad weather event. Supply and demand are rallying against milk markets this year and therefore, the price is remaining under huge pressure. The major price indicators across the world have shown weakness for many months, none more than the Global Dairy Trade auctions.

Table 1. Supply

Increase in milk supply season-on-season	EU	Ire	US	NZ
2013/2014	3.0%	4.3%	0.9%	9.4%
2014/2015	2.6%	3.3%	2.7%	2.8%
2015/2016 to date	2.14%	13.3%	1.6%	8.1%

Figure 1. GDT Auction Changes 2014-2015

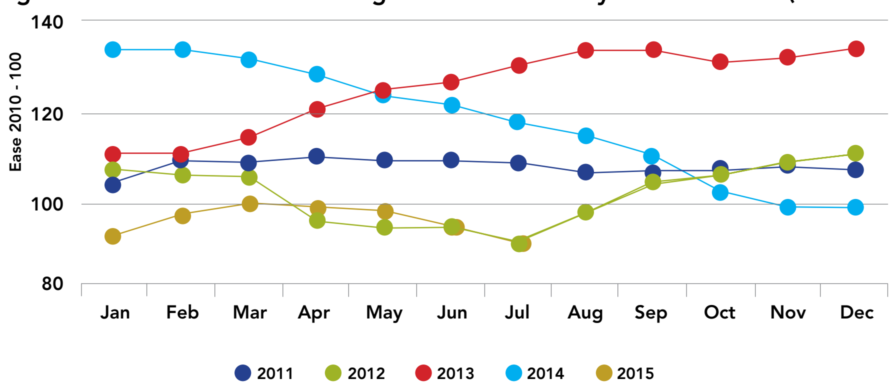


with added value products making good returns. However, the current weakness in the PPI is likely to continue for the coming months as wholesale prices and contracts set at lower prices feed into the index. July's index of 91.3 is the equivalent of 27 cpl and Co-ops and processors should have been paying at that level. Farmers have been feeling the pressure of lower prices and most Co-ops have not been paying at the level that a strict breakdown of the PPI warranted.

They had seen a significant fall since April, as seen in Figure 1. Ten successive falls have seen the index drop below 2009 levels before the dramatic 14.3% and 10.9% increases we saw in the latest auctions. The falls are mirrored in other dairy price quotes but not to the same dramatic extent. European quotes are weakening, which will feed back into the prices paid to Irish dairy farmers. The Ornua Purchasing Price Index (PPI) has delivered strong returns in the opening half of the year

While some farmers' revenues may be similar to other years due to increased production, farm income will be under enormous pressure. Farmers can expect a significant shortfall unless Commissioner Hogan and his officials do something positive and implement measures to help a struggling milk market. As a first step, we need an immediate announcement that intervention price is to be raised to 28 cpl.

Figure 2. IDB The Ornua Purhasing Price Index for July 2015 was 91.8 (2010=100)



Ornua, the home of Irish dairy – committed to innovation

Jeanne Kelly, Head of Communications, Ornua

The Ornua story is, to a large degree, the story of the unique nature of Irish grass-fed, dairy farming, rooted in traditions passed down through generations of farmers. This story is what makes Ornua different to its competitors. Every day, in many markets around the world, Ornua is sharing the story of the Irish dairy farm and the quality milk it produces.

While a rich dairy heritage is the cornerstone of Ornua's values, this alone is not enough to drive sales of Irish dairy products in a world where tastes are evolving all the time. So, while our key focus is on the quality of our ingredients, what we do with those ingredients is critical. With that, we have brought innovation to the heart of what we do.

A key part of Ornua's growth strategy is to significantly increase sales of the Kerrygold brand by developing products tailored to the needs of its diverse markets around the world. To support this strategy, Ornua is building a centre of excellence for Kerrygold butter production and packing in Mitchelstown, Co. Cork. This facility will ensure a world-class supply chain to meet the evolving needs of a growing global consumer brand, while producing new butter products that are not currently available in Ireland.

From 2016, the new Kerrygold global hub in Mitchelstown will be at the heart of Ornua's innovation strategy, delivering new Kerrygold butter products to consumers all around the world.

The Kerrygold centre of excellence will also feature an innovation centre. In each of Ornua's 110 markets, consumers have different tastes and needs. To stay ahead of these market needs, Ornua invests in extensive market research, consumer insights and new product development. From a relatively low level five years ago, new product development now accounts for approximately 15% of Ornua's sales turnover. Ornua plans to grow this number to 20% in the near future. To achieve these plans, a strong pipeline of new and innovative products will need to be developed.

Although it is too early to release what innovations will come from the new plant in Mitchelstown, among new products developed by Ornua in the last year are: Kerrygold soft blended butter, Kerrygold Kildery, Kerrygold Light and Kerrygold Extra Mature cheeses.

Another recent exciting product innovation has been the launch of Kerrygold Irish Cream Liqueur. This new premium liqueur, a delicious blend of fresh, natural cream, aged Irish whiskey and luxurious chocolate, was launched in select states in the US in August 2014. This new product, which harnesses the strength of the Kerrygold brand, has expanded quickly into additional states across the US, with more to come in the months ahead. Kerrygold Irish Cream Liqueur is now available in Dublin airport and is being launched into European markets later this year.

The greatest challenge in delivering on the potential of Irish dairy through innovation and new product development is making sure to never lose sight of the qualities that built the renowned global reputation of Irish butter and cheese in the first place. Consumers want a product they can believe in and with this in mind, Ornua is committed to never sacrificing quality for volume. We will continue to work with Ireland's dairy farmers to ensure that the reputation of Ireland's milk and dairy produce remains peerless. This mentality combined with the determination to grow, develop and innovate means that Irish dairy and Ornua has a bright future ahead.

Beef market remains positive but 2016 supply might cause downward pressure

Michael Guinan, Chairperson, ICMSA Livestock Committee

The beef industry has enjoyed a positive 2015 so far, so this article will reflect on the trends over the last year, and will look at what can be expected in the next 12 months.

Cattle supplies to beef factories decreased by 5% this year to date, and average prices are up by between 8% and 19% across the different categories of animals. The reference grade of an R3 steer is averaging €4.07per/kg, which is an increase of more than 8.5% on 2014 levels.

Table 1 shows the different grades and their prices, as well as the throughput across 2014 and 2015, and it is a positive story for beef farms that are sending animals to the factories. However, averages can mask some of the important messages in the market. Bull beef prices are up 18% this year, based on a 30% fall in the number of young bulls brought to the market. Problems in the bull beef market last year have seen this dramatic fall in supply and as a result there has been a significant increase in the number of steers put through factories this year. This increase in steers has not had an overall effect on prices as overall throughput has been lower this year. This is quite clearly shown in Table 1 also. This trend should remain for the rest of the year, ensuring relatively strong prices for factory animals. There might be some pressure on prices in the coming weeks as animals that are finished off grass are presented to factories, driving up supply in the short term. This could be short lived and prices should be strong until the year's end.

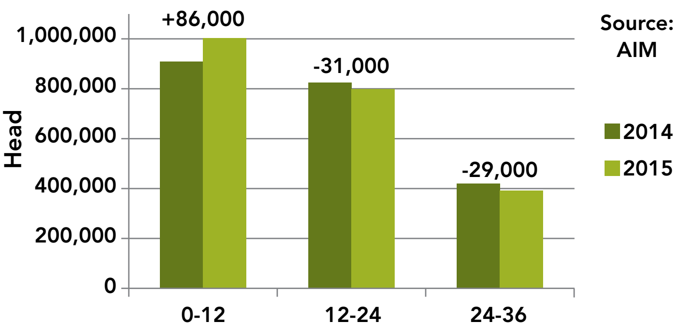
Table 1. Price and Throughout of Finished Cattle 2014-2015

		Price (€ perkg)			Throughput (Head)		
		2014	2015	% Ch	2014	2015	% Ch
Steers	03	3.58	3.89	8.7			
	04	3.60	3.91	8.6	303,697	341,362	12.4
	R3	3.75	4.07	8.5			
	U3	3.84	4.19	9.1			
Young Bulls	R3	3.53	4.00	13.3	144,948	102,447	-29.3
	U3	3.62	4.09	13.0			
Heifers	03	3.68	4.01	9.0	258,206	258,216	0.0
	R3	3.88	4.19	8.0			
Cows	03	2.88	3.44	19.4	220,573	194,208	-12.0

FUTURE SUPPLY

Calf registrations for 2015 were up 6.6% or 116,000 from 2014 levels for the first seven months of the year. This increase is predominantly from the dairy herd with an extra 97,000 calves born in that timeframe. Combined with a significant decrease in calf exports of 16,000 to over 85,000, there will be additional supplies for factories in 2016 and 2017. The lower prices for beef in 2014 were a direct result of lower calf exports in 2012 and the higher birth rate of that year. Calf registrations increased by 115,000 in 2012 from 2011 and exports of calves and weanlings declined by 60,000. As previously mentioned, this constant up and down cycle must be resolved if beef farmers are to stay profitable. Figures 1 and 2 show the AIMS profile of the country in June 2015. They also detail the decreased number of animals in the 24-36 moth bracket and the number of animals under 12 months which will lead to increased supply down the line.

Figure 1. Male cattle number by age category on 1st of June



CONSUMPTION TRENDS

Looking further afield, EU beef consumption trends over the last number of years show a worrying trend. EU consumption declined in 2013 by 3.1% and increased slightly in 2014, but it is predicted to fall again in 2015 as seen in Figure 3. There is a worrying trend worldwide that beef consumption is either static or declining in developed nations. This is partly due to the availability of cheaper meats such as pork or chicken. This substitution effect is a worry for future beef production and the era of cheaper alternatives must come to end if beef production can remain profitable into the future. Overall, the outlook for the remainder of 2015 is positive with some concerns in relation to developments in 2016.

Figure 2. Female cattle number by age category on 1st of June

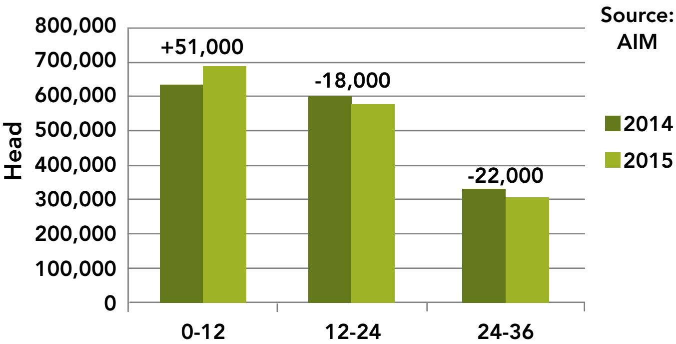
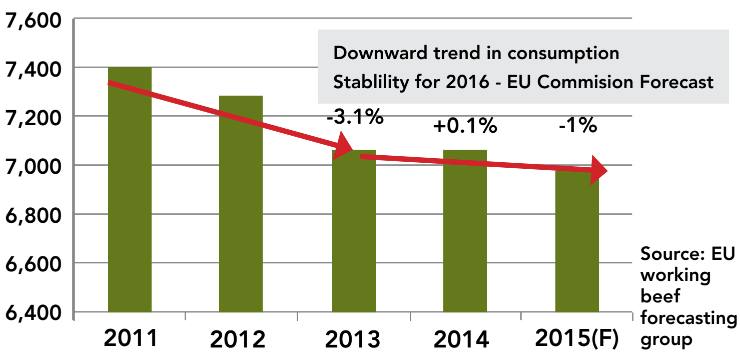


Figure 3. EU consumption, '000 tonnes



TAMS II – On-farm Capital Investment Schemes

Patrick Rohan, Chairperson, ICMSA Farm and Rural Affairs Committee

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney, recently launched the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme, the Young Farmers' Capital Investment Scheme and the Dairy Equipment Scheme. These are part of the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme II (TAMS II) under the 2014 – 2020 Rural Development Programme (RDP). The objective of these schemes is to provide support for farmers in meeting the considerable capital costs associated with the establishment and/or upgrading of their enterprise.

The maximum investment ceiling per holding for grant aid is €80,000 (€160,000 for two or more partners in a registered partnership) and will be paid on approved, completed and eligible expenditure at the rate of 60 per cent for the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme and 40 per cent for the Dairy Equipment Scheme and Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme. Applicants who receive approval to proceed with investment works at the maximum ceiling of €80,000 under the scheme shall not be eligible to apply for grants under any other TAMS II Scheme under the 2014 – 2020 RDP, with the exception of applications under the Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment Scheme.

However, it is important to note that in the case of a partnership, the partners' investment history is taken into consideration. For example, where a farmer applies for and gets approval and completes work (in 2016) under the Dairy Equipment Scheme to the value of €60,000 and gets his/her grant aid of 40 per cent. If this farmer proceeds to go into partnership with his son/daughter/young farmer in 2017 they must then apply as a partnership. The investment ceiling for the partnership in this case is €100,000 (€160,000 minus the previous approvals of €60,000). If the son or daughter in the partnership qualifies for the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme, the first €80,000 is at 60 percent with the remaining €20,000 at 40 per cent.

It is important to note that applicants for slurry storage under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme and the Animal Welfare Safety and Farm Nutrient Storage Scheme must be nitrates compliant at the time of application, based on their nitrates records from the previous year. Also, planning permission or a letter of exemption is required at time of application for relevant works.

THE FOLLOWING ARE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE YOUNG FARMERS CAPITAL INVESTMENT SCHEME:

- Applicants cannot be more than 40 years at the date of submitting the application form;
- Applicants must meet the requirements of set-up for the first time within five years of the date of receipt of application; and
- Applicants must have relevant educational qualifications at the time of application or within 36 months from time of approval to complete works.

TAMS II operates on a tranche basis with the first tranche of the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme closing on the September 18 and the first tranche of the Dairy Equipment Scheme and Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme, closing in early and late October respectively.

The ICMSA continues to work with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine regarding ongoing operational issues associated with TAMS II, such as the difference between the definition of a Young Farmer for TAMS II and the Basic Payment Scheme.

TAMS II – KEY REQUIREMENTS:

- All applications must be completed online.
- Maximum investment ceiling of €80,000 (€160,000 where two or more partners in registered partnership).
- Planning permission or letter of exemption required at time of application.
- Applicants applying for investment relating to farm waste and farm nutrient storage must ensure they are in compliance with farm nutrient waste and farm nutrient storage requirements as laid down in the Nitrates Regulations.
- Materials used in the construction of developments, must, where specified, be accompanied by relevant certificates, e.g. concrete quality certificate, slat certificate etc. as specified in the relevant specifications.
- All steel frames for buildings shall be CE certified and accompanied by a Declaration of Performance.
- Grant aid will not be given for works commenced or equipment purchased before written approval has been conveyed to the applicant by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- All works must be completed and a valid claim for payment received by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine within three years of the date of issue of approval or by a date specified in the letter of approval, whichever is earlier, and
- All items must be paid for in advance of claim for payment.

The following is a list of some of the eligible investment items under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme and Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme:

- Animal housing e.g. loose housing, slatted area, calf house with penning;
- Roofing of livestock feeding yards;
- Automatic slurry scrapers;
- Manure pit;
- Mass concrete tank;
- Pre-cast concrete tanks including cover;
- Circular slurry stores
- Calving pen;
- Isolation box;
- Unroofed fixed cattle crushes/races;
- Unroofed enclosures e.g. concrete floor, walls, gates;
- Silage pit including slab and walls;
- Resurfacing existing silage pit;
- Mobile sheep handling equipment; and
- Replacement of damaged slats or removal of existing internal agitation point and replacement by gang slats.

* A full list of eligible investment items is available on www.agriculture.gov.ie

The following is a list of eligible investment items under the Dairy Equipment Scheme.
Milking machine equipment – machine units whether in new or existing buildings, units to include and be costed to include any additional piping, pumps etc within the unit cost.
Items to include and be limited to:

- New milking machines (including the replacement of existing machine by a new machine);
- Extensions of existing machines (excluding upgrades);
- Auto washer for milking machine;
- Rotary milking machines;
- Robotic milking machines (including meal feeder and milk buffer tank)
- Heat transfer units to take heat from compressors and heat water; and
- Water heaters.

Milking machine equipment includes, but is not limited to: wash line, milk line,

- vacuum line;
- vacuum pump;
- milk pump;
- pulsators;
- swing over arms;
- milk indicator;
- automatic clusters remover;
- milk filter and vacuum regulator.

It excludes the following items:

- all stall work (rump rails, head rails, automatic bailing etc);
- mangers;
- feeders,
- meal bins;
- concrete work;
- and building work.

Milk storage equipment and ancillary cooling equipment - to be costed on a per volume basis.
Items to include and be limited to:

- Bulk milk tanks including auto washer and compressor. However grant-aid will not be paid on the retro-fitting of an auto washer or compressor or on an existing tank;
- Milk silos including auto washer and compressor;
- Ice builder; and
- Plate cooler.

In-parlour feeding system:

- Batch/multi place meal feeders;
- Individual cow meal feeders;
- Meal bin (as part of a feeding system); and
- Meal troughs.

Significant changes to State boards appointments process

In September 2014, the Government announced significant changes to the process for appointing members of State boards. The changes introduced sought to increase transparency in how appointments are made, widen the pool of potential appointees and ensure members of State boards have the appropriate skills, experience and expertise required to govern public bodies. The new process was underpinned by a set of guidelines introduced in November last year.
The Public Appointments Service (PAS) was given responsibility for key aspects of the process to identify a list of potential appointees for consideration by the relevant minister.
The PAS has been tasked with promoting this new initiative, and ensuring that there is widespread awareness of the available opportunities.
Through the www.stateboards.ie website, there is a single, dedicated point of contact for people interested in finding out about State board opportunities. Those interested in being considered for appointment can register on the website and request to receive alerts when new campaigns are advertised online.
Since the new guidelines have come into effect there have been 43 campaigns seeking expressions of interest from the public to be considered for appointment. By the end of June 2015 there were 58 people appointed to 18 state boards through this process.
There is a wide and diverse range of State boards in the commercial, administrative, advisory and regulatory fields. The PAS encourages expressions of interest from people with relevant experience who are willing to make a contribution to the performance of public bodies.
Details of all current vacancies and experience required are available on www.stateboards.ie.

Budget 2016 – Time for Imagination and logic on Farm Taxation

Lorcan Mc Cabe, Chairperson, ICMSA Farm Business Committee

The agri-food sector has played an intrinsic part in the recovery and growth of the Irish economy over the last number of years. The Irish Government and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have ambitious plans for the future of Irish agriculture as outlined in the Food Harvest 2020 report and the recently published Food Wise 2025, which sets out a ten year strategy for the Irish agri-food sector which projects exports to increase to €19 billion by 2025.

Budget 2016 must provide for the necessary adjustments to current taxation policy, as outlined in this article, to support and incentivise land mobility and farm development which will ensure the continued growth and development of the most important indigenous sector in the Irish economy.

The following is an overview of the main policy items addressed in the ICMSA 2016 Pre-Budget Submission.

INCOME TAX MEASURES TO SUPPORT FARM BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT;

Income averaging

Income averaging is a very effective mechanism for farmers to manage income volatility and the extension of income averaging from three to five years in Budget 2015 is a welcome initiative. However, it is quite evident that income volatility is, and will continue to be, an intrinsic feature of Irish agricultural production as farmers experience increased exposure to world market prices for commodities coupled with reduced EU market supports. In addition, ICMSA believes income volatility and its management varies considerably across individual sectors and in many instances farmers would benefit from having the option of choosing between three or five year averaging.

Farm Management Deposits Scheme

Farm income volatility continues to be one of the decisive factors impacting on vital management decisions regarding farm development. As with any other tradable commodity, dairy products face the potential for increases and decreases in both their demand and supply and, as a result, changes in their value on world markets. Agricultural products such as dairy commodities are traded worldwide and prices have fluctuated greatly on the commodity markets over the last number of years and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. ICMSA believes it is essential that Budget 2016 provides for the introduction of an income volatility management tool to address the current difficulties regarding self-funding of farm development coupled with the difficulties associated with the low level of after-tax income available for investment and loan repayment.

ICMSA has previously referred to the need for the introduction of what is referred to in Australia as a Farm Management Deposits Scheme (FMDS) which has both a positive farm financing component and a built-in mechanism to smooth out income over the years. This would allow a farmer to claim a tax deduction for farm management deposits in the income year in which they are made.

ICMSA believes that Budget 2016 should provide for the introduction of a scheme modelled on the FMDS which would allow farmers to avail of the 12.5% corporation tax rate for amounts deposited to a farm management account for capital investment purposes as the farm business requires. This would give participants the advantage of incorporation without the necessary cost of compliance associated with farm companies.

Personal taxation

Despite adjustments to the higher tax rate and rate bands in Budget 2015, the burden of income tax continues to impact farm families which are subject to very high tax rates at low profit levels. ICMSA believes Budget 2016 must focus on specific anomalies within the tax code with respect to the self-employed including farmers.

The PAYE allowance of €1,650 provides for employees to enter the Income Tax system at almost twice the income level of the self-employed (including farmers) and has a significant impact on low income farm families. The difference in personal allowances for taxpayers, relative to their employment status, continues to be unfair and inequitable and must be addressed in Budget 2016 and ICMSA propose the introduction of an earned income credit (EIC) for the self-employed .

Despite changes to the Universal Social Charge (USC) introduced in Budget 2015, it continues to be a particularly punitive charge on gross income which has a considerable impact on low and middle income families, including farm families. Budget 2016 must provide for a further reduction in effective USC rates.

TAXATION AND POLICY MEASURES TO SUPPORT STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN IRISH AGRICULTURE;

There has been considerable debate over the past number of years regarding the deterioration in the age profile of Irish farmers and the need to ensure mechanisms are put in place to facilitate early transfer of farm holdings. However, the age profile of Irish farming continues to deteriorate with the proportion of farmers under 35 having reduced by 50 percent in the period 1996 to 2011. In addition, the proportion of farmers over 50 years of age with no identifiable successor is a cause for concern with 40% of this cohort not having a clearly identified successor.

ICMSA believes that farm fragmentation continues to be a key feature on many Irish farm holdings, in particular on dairy farms where access to land in close proximity to the milking facilities is a key requirement. The structural problems within the Irish farming sector must be addressed in the context of achieving the Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 targets coupled with the expansion required in a post-quota era.

Income tax relief and leasing land

ICMSA firmly believes that farm families should be able to avail of the same tax relief for farm leases as non-related people and believes this anomaly must be addressed in Budget 2016.

Stamp Duty

Young trained farmers planning to take over the family farm require certainty regarding the financial burden of such transactions coupled with a degree of assurance regarding future costs in order to plan for the future growth and development of their farming enterprise. In this context, ICMSA believe it is essential the Young Trained Farmers Stamp Duty Relief, which is due to expire on December 31, 2015, is extended to the end of the current CAP Rural Development Programme in 2020.

Capital Gains Tax

The rate of Capital Gains Tax has increased exorbitantly in the period from 2008 and is having a negative impact on land sales. ICMSA believes the re-introduction of indexation, which was withdrawn in 2002, is required in order to act as a catalyst to encourage land mobility. In addition, ICMSA proposes that the first €5,000 of an individual's chargeable gain (net of allowable losses) should be exempt from Capital Gains Tax.

Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT)

Transfer of the family farm to the next generation in a timely manner is essential to ensure the continued growth and viability of the agri-sector. However, ICMSA has concerns regarding the impact of the significant erosion of CAT tax-free thresholds on the ability of farm families to transfer the family farm without incurring any tax liabilities. ICMSA believes the Government must re-examine the tax-free thresholds in Budget 2016, particularly with a view to increasing the tax-free amount for transfers from parent to child/niece/nephew.

The 90% Agricultural Relief for CAT is a cornerstone relief with regard to the transfer of land from one generation to the next and must be maintained at its current rate in Budget 2016. Any downward movement in this relief would have a detrimental effect on the transfer of family farms and the ongoing viability of the agri-sector.

FARM INVESTMENT TAX INCENTIVES

Capital allowances

Capital allowances are a necessary tool for farmers investing in the expansion and upgrading of farm facilities to ensure the future viability of their business. ICMSA proposes the introduction of a choice to write-off capital expenditure on plant and machinery and farm buildings over a period of between three and eight years to facilitate maximum utilisation. In addition, ICMSA believes the 'floating allowance' which was available as part of the enhanced capital allowances for pollution control should be reintroduced.

Farm safety initiatives

Statistics from the Health and Safety Authority show that fatalities in agriculture accounted for 30 deaths in 2014, which represents an 87% increase. In addition, there has been 11 fatalities to date in 2015. Farming continues to be a very dangerous occupation. The rate of fatal farm accidents per 100,000 farmers in Ireland is 60% higher than in the UK and double that of some EU countries. Over 50 percent of fatal accidents in the Irish work place in 2014 occurred on farms despite only 5 percent of Irish workers being engaged in agriculture. Also, it is estimated that in excess of 3,000 individuals are injured in farm accidents on a yearly basis.

Financial constraints on farmers often results in a lack of investment in the upgrading of safety equipment and clothing. In this context, ICMSA proposes that farmers should be allowed to claim back VAT on farm safety equipment and clothing.

In addition, in order to alleviate the cost burden on farmers, ICMSA proposes the introduction of a scrappage scheme for PTO shafts as was recommended in the Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Farm Safety.

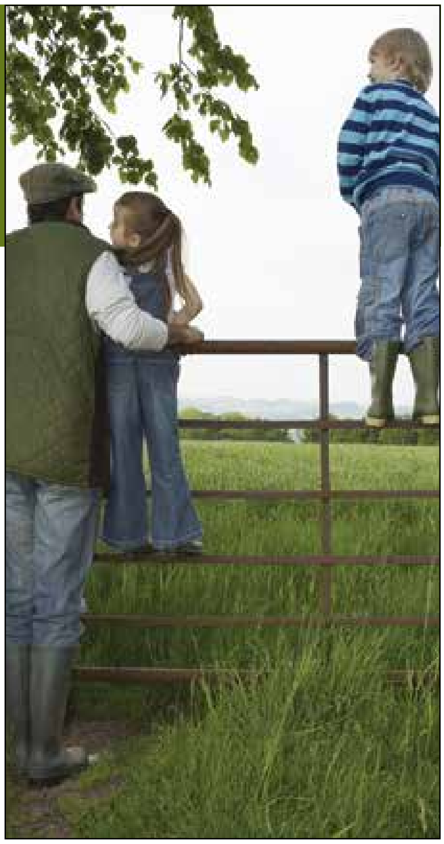
Presentation to Con Scully, the personification of West Cork ICMSA

The Executive Committee travelled to the Innishannon House Hotel last Thursday 20 August to make a presentation to Mr Con Scully, described as 'the personification' of the association in West Cork. Mr Scully is a past President and has served on the Milk Quota Appeals Tribunal since its establishment in 1990. Making the presentation John Comer said that it was almost impossible to quantify the work that the Clonakilty man had done for farm families over the decades and always done in the finest spirit of service and dedication underpinned by a superb knowledge of dairying and the wider farm sector. Representatives of West Cork ICMSA also attended as Mr & Mrs Scully were presented with what the President described as a small token of the esteem in which they are held by their friends in ICMSA.

Back Row, L to R, Pat McCormack, Deputy President, Lorcan McCabe, Gerald Quain, John Skehan, Eamonn Carroll, Denis Carroll, Michael P. O'Sullivan

Front Row, John Enright, General Secretary, Eileen Calnan, Secretary, West Cork ICMSA, Mrs Jodie Scully, Mr Con Scully, John Comer, President, Tom Wilson, Chairperson, West Cork ICMSA and Des Morrison

Land mobility – grant scheme to support collaborative farming initiatives



The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney, recently launched a new €3m grant scheme, providing financial support for collaborative farming initiatives. The scheme, to be funded under Ireland's Rural Development Programme and co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), will cover some of the costs for farmers who wish to combine their enterprises and form partnerships. The aim of this grant scheme is to encourage the establishment of new farm partnership arrangements by contributing to the legal, advisory and financial services costs incurred by farmers in the drawing up of their farm partnership agreement. While the grant is initially aimed at farm partnerships, it is proposed that the other forms of collaboration, e.g. shared farming and contract rearing, will also benefit under this Scheme once the necessary detailed rules governing these arrangements are in place.

It is broadly accepted that the deteriorating age profile of Irish farmers is a significant issue which must be addressed with the proportion of Irish farmers under 35 halving in the period 1996 to 2011. As a consequence, the proportion of farmers over 55 actually increased from 32 per cent to 40 per cent in the same period. In addition, a recent survey found that 40 per cent of farmers over 50 years of age had no identifiable successor leading in many instances to poor utilisation of the land which is regularly let on a short-term basis prior to the death of the farmer. In these instances it may be useful to look at collaborative arrangements which would allow the older farmer to stay involved/active at least in the short term. It would also make valuable land available to a younger farmer who wants to grow and develop his/her farm business.

OBJECTIVES OF THE GRANT SCHEME:

- To address issues of scale and efficiency within primary agricultural production by encouraging the consolidation of blocks of land held and operated by farmers not within the same family;
- To employ new skills and specialisation in primary production through the required enhanced educational qualifications of the participants in the partnerships;
- To improve the age structure of Irish agriculture by supporting arrangements that have at least one partner who qualifies as a young farmer (under 40), with priority being given to partnerships that also have a partner who is over 60 years of age; and
- To bring added value to the new arrangement, with priority being given to those partnerships that bring the stronger economic potential to the new enterprise and to the economy.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- The Scheme is open to all 'brand new' farm partnerships that have been placed on the Department's Register of Farm Partnerships and that have been allocated a Farm Partnership Registration Number (FPRN).
- Former Milk Production Partnerships, either in whole or amended format, are not eligible for this Scheme.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The Scheme will be operated in tranches. The first tranche will relate to applications received up to the period ending June 30, 2015. The next tranche, which will open in January 2016 and will relate to the eligible applications received up to the end of December 2015.

RANKING AND SELECTION

All applications received will be subjected to a ranking and selection criteria. Unsuccessful applicants, who fail to receive payment in one tranche, may be considered in subsequent tranches.

PAYMENT

The payment will be calculated as 50 per cent of vouched cost for each of the legal, advisory and financial services secured in the drawing up of the farm partnership agreement, up to a maximum payment of €2,500. Payments relating to the first tranche will issue early December 2015.

North South Interconector Planning Application meetings

Delegates from Cavan, Meath and Monaghan ICMSA met at the Headfort Hotel in Kells on 5 August to discuss the North-South Interconnector Planning Application.

Above, L to R, John Cooney, Area Development Officer, Seamus Miggin, Athboy, Kieran O'Brien, Garristown, Chair, Meath ICMSA, Paddy Cassidy, Athboy, and Joe Hannon, Kiltale.

Above and right, John Cooney, Gerard Reilly, Shercock, Secretary, Cavan ICMSA, Henry Smith, Kingscourt, Lorcan McCabe, Bailieboro, Chair of Farm Business Committee, Pat Farrell, Kingscourt, and Brendan McMahon, Muff, both of NEPP.

The new Farmers' Charter 2015-2020 – What it will mean to you

By Pat McCormack, Deputy President.

The Farmers Charter of Rights 2015-2020 was agreed in June 2015 and sets out the key parameters for the interaction between a farmer and the Department in relation to the many Department Schemes that impact on farmers on a daily basis. The Charter contains commitments in relation to a number of schemes including the Basic Payment Scheme and Greening (formerly the Single Farm Payment), the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme (ANC, formerly the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme), the Beef Genomics and Data Programme, Knowledge Transfer Scheme, TAMS II, GLAS and animal health related schemes. The Farmers Charter does not deal with all the issues of concern for farmers but it does address some of our concerns and ICMSA will briefly outline in this article some of the key points in the Charter. The Charter is available online at www.icmsa.ie or at http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/customerfarmerscharter/.

1. BASIC PAYMENT AND GREENING SCHEMES (FORMERLY SINGLE PAYMENT SCHEME):

The Charter sets out in general the procedure for resolving queries and timeframes, the types of inspections that take place, the procedures for inspections, how the inspector is supposed to interact with the farmer, the notice period allowed, how inspections are selected, when payments will be made under the scheme and how minor breaches of inspection are dealt with. In relation to inspections, it is important to point out that some elements still remain unannounced while other elements are allowed notice. In the case of a Full Cross Compliance inspection, this inspection will be unannounced. However, the farmer can if he/she wishes postpone the announced elements of the inspection for at least 48 hours and this should be explained to the farmer by the inspector. An issue that causes problems is missing tags and it has been agreed under the Charter that if the farmer has ordered the tags in advance of the inspection, no penalty will be applied.

2. BEEF DATA AND GENOMICS PROGRAMME:

The Charter sets out the procedures in relation to applying for the scheme, payments under the scheme and inspection procedures.

3. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER SCHEME:

The Charter sets out the application process, payments, inspections and the procedure for resolving queries.

4. GLAS AND GLAS +:

GLAS, the new agri-environment scheme that has replaced REPS and AEOS is also part of the Charter. The Charter sets out the application process, the payment structure and process, and the link with the Basic Payment Scheme declaration.

5. TAMS II:

The TAMS II scheme is the new on-farm investment scheme and includes the Young Farmers Scheme, the Dairy Equipment Scheme, and the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme. The Charter sets out the timeframes for approval and payments, the tranche system and also how the grant is calculated. The more detailed conditions of the scheme are available on the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine website, www.agriculture.gov.ie.

6. ANIMAL HEALTH SCHEME:

TB outbreaks present a major problem for many Irish farmers on an annual basis. The Charter sets out the procedures the Department should adopt in the event of a TB outbreak in a herd and how the Department should deal with the farmer including appeals procedures.

Scheme related problems are an ongoing problem for ICMSA members and ICMSA has a dedicated team that is available to assist members who run into difficulties with Department schemes. Should a problem arise for you in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact ICMSA at head office and we will provide you with every assistance possible. The Farmers Charter while not perfect certainly provides a number of key commitments that will assist farmers and I would encourage every farmer to refer to the Charter to find out exactly what is required of you but equally what is required of the Department when dealing with farmers.

Leinster House Meeting With Minister Frances Fitzgerald

A delegation comprising John Comer, President, Pat McCormack, Deputy President, John Enright, General Secretary and Mary Buckley, Policy Officer, travelled to Leinster House in early June to meet Minister Frances Fitzgerald to discuss issues ranging from the ongoing concerns around rural policing to pre-nuptial agreements.

Significant progress through the Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme and Origin Green

Origin Green IRELAND Working with nature

Origin Green ambassadors promoting sustainable dairy across the globe

Eighteen months in and great strides have been made with the Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS). At home, almost 70% of Irish dairy farmers are participating in the scheme, while internationally the SDAS and Origin Green are providing the Irish dairy industry with a unique message that resonates strongly with customers.

While standards are very high on Irish dairy farms, the SDAS now provides the industry with the tools to demonstrate and showcase these high standards and best practices to customers across the globe.

Customers are sitting up and taking notice of what Irish producers are doing at farm level with the SDAS. Some of the largest multinational companies globally have visited Ireland in recent months to see at first-hand how the SDAS operates, how unique a programme it is and how sustainable our system is.

When international delegates visit an Irish dairy farm, engage with a dairy farmer, view our grass-based production system, combined with the continuous audits and improvements, this leaves delegates with a very strong impression of the Irish dairy sector. Indeed, many of these companies now acknowledge that Ireland is ahead of the curve within the global dairy industry when it comes to dairy sustainability and the SDAS has significantly increased Ireland's profile with many customers.

Ten Origin Green ambassadors have just completed a two-year programme promoting Ireland's Origin Green programme and sustainable dairy industry. These 10 individuals have been on placement working with some of the world's largest food companies such as Danone, Starbucks, Mars, Abbott, Pepsi Co, Marks & Spencer, Tesco, Walmart, McDonalds, Nestle and Asda.

The aim of the Origin Green ambassador programme is to:

- Raise the profile and understanding of Ireland and its sustainable practices among the key trade audiences internationally;
- Provide the Irish food and drink industry with comprehensive insight on what is happening with some of the world's largest food companies; and
- Develop a cohort of executive talent with a high level of awareness of sustainability.

SDAS SURVEY FEEDBACK

Bord Bia provides all dairy farmers with a post-audit feedback/survey form which can be filled out and returned to Bord Bia. This provides us with valuable insights into the scheme and the audit process, and allows Bord Bia to identify any issues that may need consideration. To date, in excess of 500 completed surveys have been returned and the majority of the feedback is positive.

Some of the top-line results from the survey include:

- 97% of respondents agreed that the auditor maintained a professional approach throughout the audit;
- 96% believed that the findings of the audit were fair; and
- 84% felt that the audit was useful to highlight health and safety issues that were not previously considered on the farm.

EUROPEAN JOURNALISTS SEE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES IN ACTION

Bord Bia recently hosted members of the European Network of Agricultural Journalists (ENAJ) for a three-day visit to learn about Ireland`s agriculture production and processing systems. Approximately 15 journalists from 10 European countries received a presentation on Ireland`s sustainability programme, Origin Green, before embarking on visits to a quality assured beef farm and a quality assured dairy farm. They also visited Dairygold, Teagasc Moorepark, ABP Cahir, ICBF Tully, and Alltech to experience first-hand the dedication that is driving the industry.

Minister Coveney also provided an informal briefing on Food Wise 2025, the strategic plan for the development of Ireland's agri-food sector over the next decade.

The ENAJ facilitates networking and exchange of information and is currently chaired by Damien O'Reilly from RTE Radio One's CountryWide.

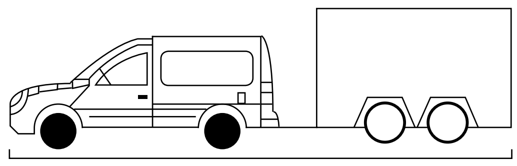
European agricultural journalists meet Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney, at Dairygold's state-of-the-art milk processing site in Mitchelstown

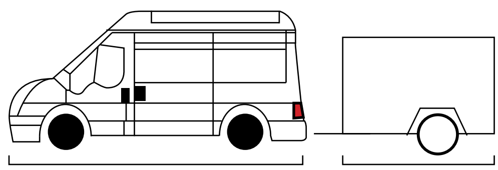
What you have to know to tow: Get guidance on trailers

Before towing a trailer, it is important to understand what combinations of towing vehicles and trailers you are allowed to tow, depending on the category of driving licence you hold. It is also important that you identify the towing capacity of your vehicle, and the load-carrying capacity of your trailer, says the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

The RSA will shortly publish a booklet and suite of videos containing detailed advice and guidance on towing light trailers, i.e. trailers with a maximum weight (as specified by the manufacturer) not exceeding 3,500kg. Such trailers typically include anything from small, domestic trailers to general duty trailers including flatbed or plant trailers, car transporters, trailer caravans, horse boxes and livestock trailers.

The headings under which advice is provided includes the following: The Law and Driving Licence Entitlements; Trailer Roadworthiness; Coupling and Uncoupling; Loading and Unloading, Road Safety; Trailer Security; and finally, Preparing for the BE Driving Test. If you comply with the guidance provided in both the booklet and videos under those headings, you can be confident your journey will be much safer.





THE LAW AND DRIVING LICENCE ENTITLEMENTS

It is important to distinguish between a driving licence and a learner permit (which is issued to those learning how to drive). Both documents have different entitlements.

- A category B driving licence authorises you to drive a car, van or 4 x 4 which has a maximum weight (as specified by the manufacturer) of not more than 3,500kg and is designed and constructed to carry no more than eight passengers in addition to the driver. You may tow a trailer with a maximum weight (again as specified by the manufacturer) not greater than 750kg, or where the maximum weight is more than 750kg, the combined

Some important dates coming up fast!

Income Tax Returns

September

- Pay & File Payment Reminder letters will begin to issue. These serve as a reminder that:
    - Payment of Preliminary Tax for the current year of assessment, must be paid by 31 October, and
    - Payment of the balance of Income Tax for the previous year, must be paid by 31 October.

October

- Pay current year Preliminary Tax by 31 October,
- File your tax return for the previous tax year by 31 October. Failure to send your completed tax return and self-assessment by this date will result in a surcharge (5% where the return is submitted within two months, otherwise 10%) being added to your final tax bill,
- Pay the balance of tax for the previous year by 31 October,
- File your Capital Gains Tax return for the previous tax year by 31 October.

The **Pay and File** system provides this facility for you, **on a single due date – 31 October.**

National Ploughing Championships

We'll be located right at the heart of the action again this year at the Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska and the Irish Examiner- ICMSA 'What's Troubling Irish Farmers' survey will feature heavily in that paper on all three days of the Championship. The Irish Examiner-ICMSA survey is now well on the way to becoming an integral part of the week in which the national gaze turns to our sector. Thanks to the readers who participated in the nationwide survey and don't forget to buy the paper and support our very worthwhile joint venture.

We're right beside the NPA Head Office at Row 25, Number 426, and we're inviting everyone to call in for tea - we might even have a little present for members!

We're expecting a busy one - on all fronts – but we believe that nothing is more important than the opportunity to meet the farm families who we represent so, please, come in, sit down, and allow us to help in any way we can.

Representatives of Campion Insurance will be available for free expert advice that'll save you money on all aspects of insurance and there'll be the usual hustle-and-bustle as old friends meet.

Last year was a great Championship and this year promises to be the same. Check all access routes on www.npa.ie

maximum weight of the towing vehicle and the trailer is not greater than 3,500kg.
- A category BE driving licence authorises you to tow a trailer where the combined maximum weight of the towing vehicle and trailer is greater than 3,500kg.
- As a general rule, a category B licence does not entitle the holder to tow a horsebox or a livestock trailer because the combined maximum weight would exceed 3,500kg.

The holder of a Category B learner permit may not tow any trailer – whatever the size.

ENTITLEMENTS OF A CATEGORY B LICENCE HOLDER

Trailer roadworthiness

If you're towing a trailer, it is your responsibility, as the driver, to ensure that both the towing vehicle and trailer are safe and mechanically sound, fit for purpose, and legally compliant with all relevant road traffic legislation. Tyres must have adequate tread depth and be free from defects, lights and brakes must be working and the hitch must be in good condition. Remember, to be fully compliant, your towing vehicle must be taxed, insured and have passed its roadworthiness test – that is, the National Car Test (NCT) or Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT), as appropriate.

Coupling and uncoupling

Before coupling a trailer, make sure you read the relevant sections of your vehicle and trailer handbooks. Do not try coupling or uncoupling a trailer on your own until you are fully familiar with all the steps and can complete them safely. All drivers towing trailers are responsible for learning how to couple/uncouple a trailer safely. As with any manual handling task, proper training and instruction, along with common sense and using proper techniques, will reduce the risk of personal injury. For example, should you load the trailer before or after you hitch it to the drawing vehicle? If possible, it makes sense to hitch an empty trailer to the drawing vehicle.

Loading and unloading

Loads must be evenly distributed and securely tied down. Unevenly distributed loads will reduce the stability of the vehicle combination and increase the likelihood of an accident. Loads should also be positioned in such a way as to keep the nose weight (that is, the weight exerted by the trailer drawbar on the coupling) within the limit specified by the manufacturer of the drawing vehicle. Make sure you are familiar with safe loading practices and always follow them.

Road safety

Remember, your vehicle will handle differently when you're towing a trailer, especially when the trailer is loaded. Therefore, you need to take special care and drive more defensively, anticipating the effect of the trailer. For example, you need to ask yourself has your stopping distance increased – in most cases, the answer will be yes.

Trailer security

If possible, you should store your trailer on a property or in a building close to your house, which has security features. You should keep a record of the vehicle identification number (VIN) which is visible on the manufacturer's plate. This number is also usually stamped on the trailer chassis. You should also consider putting your own unique marking on your trailer to help you identify it if it is stolen. This can be an effective deterrent. Remember to photograph your trailer, including the manufacturer's plate and any unique marking you put elsewhere on it.

Preparing for the BE Driving Test

If you do not hold a full category BE licence and you wish to tow trailers with a maximum weight exceeding 750kg, or vehicle combinations where the combined maximum weight of the vehicle and trailer combination exceeds 3,500kg, you will need to pass a practical driving test. If you have never passed a theory test, you will need to pass one before you can apply for your category BE learner permit. Before you apply for a driving test, get plenty of training and practice with an RSA approved driving instructor (ADI). Once you have your learner permit, you should visit www.rsa.ie to find an ADI who provides category BE training. Names and contact details are available from the section called 'Find an Instructor'. Your ADI will assess your knowledge and skill and will develop a training plan to help you to practice and to prepare for your practical driving test.

Finally, remember that the maximum speed limit for a vehicle towing a trailer is 80km/h, and this also applies on roads where the posted road sign speed limit is higher. As always, drivers are subject to the lowest posted speed sign, so it will not always be possible to travel at 80km/h.

ICMSA Sponsor Lifetime Achievement Award For The Power Behind The Ploughing!

The power behind the annual Ploughing Championships received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Zurich Farming Independent 'Farmer of the Year' Event held at Dublin's Ballsbridge Hotel in May. The category was sponsored by ICMSA and, making the presentation, John Comer noted that the real test of celebrity was to be known universally by a first name. He cited Barack, Madonna and Cher and then observed that everyone in Ireland knew immediately who you were talking about if you mentioned "Anna May". He went on to describe McHugh as the driving force and inspiration behind the biggest outdoor agri-event in Europe and a national landmark occasion.

Eircode: Making sure nobody gets left behind

Postcodes were introduced in Ireland in July and an outreach programme was implemented to ensure that everyone understood what exactly this new location code was about, according to Dónall Geoghegan, Programme Manager for the Eircode Community Outreach Programme.

An Eircode is a smart location code for all Irish addresses. Unlike other countries, where postcodes define clusters or groups of addresses, an Eircode identifies an individual address – rural or urban – and helps to identify exactly where that address is located. In recent weeks, every residential address and business received a unique Eircode.

The benefits of Eircode are numerous. Not only does it make the delivery of services and goods to households easier, but in the case of a medical emergency, being able to accurately and quickly identify an address has the potential to save valuable minutes.

All residents and businesses received a letter notifying them of the Eircode for their address in July. Addresses did not change. Simply, the Eircode was added to them.

The Wheel, a support and representative body connecting community and voluntary organisations across Ireland, working closely with Irish Rural Link, led a nationwide effort to reach out to people when Eircodes were introduced. Twenty-three 'outreach champions' led the drive throughout the country to reach these people and offer them basic information and reassurance on the change. They mobilised more than 11,000 volunteers from in excess of 5,000 community and voluntary organisations right around the country, holding over 1,200 events and involving them in reaching out within their own community. They focused on reaching out to people who are older, isolated or vulnerable who may not have understood, or may have become confused, by what this change means. More than 170,000 people in this target group were reached.

While the Outreach Programme has now finished, some people may still need assistance. If you know someone who you believe might need help, encourage them to contact the Eircode helpline at 0818-300-005 (lo-call) or see www.eircode.ie.