

**Address by Professor Gerry Boyle, Director of
Teagasc**

UCD Conferring Ceremony

Dairy Business Degree

2nd September 2013

President, Dean, distinguished members of UCD academic staff, graduates, ladies and gentlemen; I am privileged to have been invited to address you at this evening's Conferring Ceremony.

At the outset, let me congratulate all of you who are graduating here today. Today is a very significant day in your lives: the day when many of you will have completed the highest level of studies that you will attain in your life. It is an achievement that you can be proud of and one that your parents can be proud of. Well done on your hard work over the years and congratulations to your family for the support they have provided and given to you during your studies to-date.

And I do mean studies to-date, because for many of you this is the first step, as you embark on a journey of life-long learning. Your education doesn't just stop today. Improving our education is something that we must continuously strive to achieve during our lives. New challenges require us to re-educate ourselves, to think differently and to better equip us for our working lives,

wherever that may take us. With your qualifications, all kinds of exciting doors will open to you, in agriculture, food business, science, nutritional science, rural development. The opportunities are endless. They are out there for you to seek out and pursue.

Wherever your future careers take you, be it into farming, the food industry, business, the scientific sector, or further research, you will undoubtedly be presented with new opportunities to further your education, and my simple piece of advice to you is to grasp these opportunities as they arise and make the most of them, because education is a light load to carry through life. One of our current challenges is to ensure that the richness of Ireland i.e. people like yourselves is valued and that education at all levels is seen as an investment and not a cost.

Teagasc is involved as partners with this university in several educational and research initiatives. Many of you will, I hope, progress to undertake masters and doctoral programmes under our Walsh Fellowships Scheme. And I strongly encourage those of you that may be interested in pursuing postgraduate studies to explore this innovative scheme and talk to your lecturers about the exciting research possibilities that exist.

Today, I'm especially pleased to address among you the inaugural graduation class of the highly innovative Dairy Business Degree. Teagasc was actively involved in the development of this degree and in its delivery at Kildalton

College and Teagasc Moorepark.

Incidentally, while as students of this degree you have had to suffer the pre-fab facilities at Moorepark, it may provide some comfort to note that your successors, within a couple of years, will enjoy spanking new facilities at Moorepark thanks to the generosity of FBD who are investing €2 million, matched by another €2 million from Teagasc to construct a state-of-the-art complex to be known as the "Paddy O'Keeffe Dairy Innovation Centre". This facility will be available for the benefit of future generations of students of agriculture and food.

The Dairy Business Degree is, as I've said, a highly innovative programme of studies that combines a thorough grounding in agricultural science, matched by business modules taught at Ireland's premier business school, and involves an exposure to cutting-edge dairy research at Teagasc Moorepark together with an experiential work placement at Teagasc Kildalton and on farms in New Zealand. [I envy you!]

This programme was a direct response by both UCD and Teagasc to the requirements of industry stakeholders. While there were several people within UCD and Teagasc that saw the need for a programme such as this, there is no doubt that without the vision and relentless commitment of the former President of the IFA, Padraig Walsh, this degree would never have materialised.

It's fitting that Padraig is with us today to mark this

occasion. [And he's joined by the equally persuasive former General Secretary of the IFA, Michael Berkery, who also played an important role in bringing this degree into existence.]

For all graduates today this is an exciting time to be involved in the agriculture and food industry. There is, at long last, a widespread recognition that this great industry can provide worthwhile employment and profitable business opportunities for committed smart, young people. We have some of the most competitive farmers in the world – [many of whom are in this room]. We have world-beating innovative companies such as Kerry and Glanbia that are committed to recruiting our best graduates.

But there is another real tangible reason to be confident about the future. In a little over 19 months from now you will be the first generation to work in an industry where all farmers themselves will again have the freedom to decide how much output they should produce. It is a natural inclination of all farmers, and especially young farmers, to advance their levels of production from one generation to the next. The quota regime has stifled that natural inclination for nearly 30 years. [For those among you that hail from dairy farms, I surmise most of your parents have farmed under the restriction of the quota.]

But your parents I'm sure would never forgive me if I didn't stress that this new found freedom will not be without risk! Expansion, unless it's profitable is a recipe for ruination. Expansion will not eradicate any underlying efficiency

deficiencies in any industry. The message here is simple: do whatever needs putting right first before any expansion is contemplated!

I'm conscious as we gather here this evening, that the burial is taking place of a great poet of our land. A poet that understood the elemental importance of the land.

I, like I'm sure many of you, searched out Seamus Heaney's poems over the weekend. Two of these poems ... "Digging" and "Follower" have a fitting resonance to our ceremony this evening. Both poems are concerned with the phenomenon of transition and change in several dimensions.

In "Digging" the Heaney writes ...

"By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.

[pause]

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it."

I'm sure many would see these lines as, in part, representing the transition from an agricultural to a post-

agricultural society. But I think we can also read them as depicting the transition within agriculture from an era when the dominant attribute of a successful farmer was that of physical and skilful labour to one where the application of knowledge now holds sway. The production and processing and marketing of food now, and more so in the future, require people that are educated to the highest level. You represent that generation, who to paraphrase Heaney, will "dig" with the power of your knowledge.

I was also struck in reading his poem the "Follower" that transition from one generation to the next is part and parcel of agricultural life. That transition can have a poignancy and sometimes a bitter-sweet aspect that's challenging for all generations.

In "Follower" Heaney writes ...

"My father worked with a horse-plough,

...

I wanted to grow up and plough,
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.
All I ever did was follow
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
Yapping always. But today
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me, and will not go away."

Most of you graduates come from farms. Many of you I'm

sure, and more probably your parents, will smilingly recall times where you were a "... nuisance, tripping, falling. Yapping always" as a youngster in the milking parlour, the cattle shed or the silage pit.

Your parents will, no doubt, have had a natural longing of most farmers for their son or daughter to take on the home farm ... "to grow up and plough". Many of you today will fulfil that wish in one way or another.

But there is a challenge to the current generation to let go; to be prepared at the appropriate time to be the follower of that once "nuisance, tripping, falling. Yapping always" youngster. I'm not just talking about ownership but more so about the management of the farming business. You graduates have been educated to be the leaders of tomorrow and that requires you to challenge the current generation to do things better. You must be disruptive to succeed.

So ... graduates ... tomorrow is not just the beginning of the rest of your life; parents it's also a new beginning for you!

Thank you and enjoy the rest of your day.

Professor Gerry Boyle, Director Teagasc