

**Meeting minutes from Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> of July - Pasture Profit Index Industry Meeting at the FBD Hall, Paddy O’Keeffe Building, Moorepark, Co. Cork**

Chairman Dr Brian Wickham

80 industry stakeholders in attendance, along with plant breeders

Started proceedings by updating the audience on where the PPI is at present while also discussing the outcome of the previous meeting which was held in November 2014 at the Horse and Jockey. The objective of this project is to improve grass genetics and as a result increase the profitability of Irish grassland farmers, New proof published in 2015 with 2014 data this is to continue for the future with the latest proof using the most up to date information.

1. – Laurence Shalloo – Moorepark – Review of the PPI and New Developments

Gave a breakdown of the different traits in the PPI and how the economic value for each component is calculated.

These traits include seasonal DM production, quality, silage DM yield and persistency

Milk price pre 2004 was relative stable however with the last 10 years milk price has been very volatile.

Q – Should more traits be included in the PPI

Yes definitely – it was suggested that a grass utilisation trait would be included as a 10% increase in grass utilisation will reduce the costs by 2.5 cent. Options to be looked at.

Q – Should milk price be included in the PPI and should the index be updated every year. Every two to three years has been the approach with the EBI.

Milk price is a very small component at the moment in the PPI before will not become significant as want to keep it a level playing field for the other enterprises – beef and sheep

Updating PPI annually in up to the feedback he gets from the shakeholders. It is planned to review the PPI index in 2016

Q How is the economic value for the trait persistency calculated

Persistency is calculated by the cost of reseeding spread out over 12 years. For example the cost of reseeding is €650/ha over 12 years is €54. Persistency has the biggest weighing on the PPI (34%) at the moment. There seems to be a miss understanding surrounding the definition of persistency and ground score.

Persistency – is a plants ability to maintain both population numbers (tillers) and Dry matter yield while ground score - is an estimate of perennial ryegrass content of a sward at a given point of time.

2. David Cummins – DAFM – Irish national List/Recommend list Perennial Ryegrass Variety

Update on Perennial Ryegrass sowings in 2015

Q in 2015 there are varieties sown in 5 locations across Ireland, however simulated grazing was only practiced at three locations. Is it possible to have stimulated grazing across all sites and to increase the reliability of each variety?

No - mainly due to resources stimulated grazing cannot be done over all sites

Q what is the weed control criteria – is there a problem with weeds on DAFM plots

Weed control is minimal – when the variety is established it will be treated with a post emergent herbicide to control any weed. For the following two years very little spraying is practiced

Q How are varieties selected for evaluation

Breeders asked to submit varieties at the start of every season, DAFm evaluate these proposals and make selections.

3. Michael O'Donovan – Teagasc – Grass Cultivar Evaluation results on farm 2013 - 2014

Review of the web based grassland management programme – PastureBase Ireland

Q Germinal – should soil fertility be standardised across commercial sites

Majority of farms on the cultivar evaluation trial have soil samples tested and soil fertility is not a major issue. The variability in soil fertility reflects what is happening at farm level.

Q – George – How long will this trial go on for into the future

This trial was never a short term evaluation. It will be going on for many years and long as the farmers want to participate in it and show an interest in varieties and willing to take measurement weekly. It is the farmer who is gaining in the long term as they are gaining access to genetically improved grass varieties and as a result will increase the profitability of their business.

Q MI Crowley – Farmer – Can farmers send in grass samples of Moorepark for analysis

In January the participating farmers were asked if they would be able to send in grass samples from each monoculture before the cows graze the paddock. The

feedback from them at that stage suggested that the farmers did not have enough time to take and sent in these samples. However if farmers think they have time to take samples they are welcome to send grass samples for analysis.

Q Drummonds – Should mixtures be sown on participating farms

At the beginning of this project there was no buy –in by the farmers in relation to sowing mixtures. If we can identify elite varieties and the most important traits leading to profitability, then possibly we can start using the elite varieties in mixtures but for the moment we will concentrate with monocultures.

4. – Alan Lovett (IBER)

Alan's work in Aberystwyth is all plot based evaluations. They have commenced genomic selection with grass genes and will dramatically reduce the time need to validate a variety.

Q MI Bateman should more trials be introduced to the PPI to make it more reliable

Yes is the short answer to this; In Aberystwyth Alan has been looking at 'public good' traits for example efficient use of nutrients which will greatly increase the robustness of the PPI.

5. Pat Conaghan – Teagasc- Teagasc Breeding Programme; Perennial Ryegrass

Genomic selection is now underway which takes approximately two years to conduct. This will dramatically increase the breeding process, reducing it from a possible 10 years. It will also identify underperforming varieties earlier.

Q Brian Wickham – is the a concern the plant breeders are working alone instead of working together and achieving better results, working towards the same objective.

The breeding material that a plant breeder starts off with is commercial and they do not want to share an information as it would have a negative effect on the competitive edge.

Comment – Tom O'Dwyer – In Ireland all animal data is freely available to anyone who requires it. The same should be possible with plant breeding data. We have made great progress when it comes to animal breeding and the Economic Breeding Index. Plant breeding is lagging behind.

6. David Johnston – AFBI – Overview of Breeding Objectives

From early 2015 a PPI value was generated for every variety. David is looking towards varieties which have a high DM yield for a two – three cut silage system for the indoor systems in Northern Ireland. David stressed that crown rust is becoming more of a disease risk in Ireland and it is critical that varieties are resistant to the disease.

Brian Wickham – Good progress has been made to date and this needs to continue into the future.