

Putting Technologies into Practice

John & Brendan Walsh

Ballylooby, County Tipperary

John and Brendan Walsh from Ballylooby, County Tipperary were announced as the Teagasc / FBD Environmentally Sustainable Farmer of the Year 2024 at the awards ceremony in County Laois on Tuesday, 1st October.



John and Brendan Walsh from Ballylooby, Co. Tipperary were announced as the overall winners of the inaugural Teagasc/FBD Environmental Sustainability Awards. Pictured were John and Brendan Walsh receiving the award from Dr Laura Burke, Director of the EPA.

The awards, kindly sponsored by FBD, were presented to five enterprise winners: dairy, suckler beef, dairy beef, sheep, and tillage, and to four category winners: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing biodiversity, improving water quality and improving soil health and carbon sequestration.

John and Brendan Walsh are dairy farming near Ballylooby in County Tipperary. They are operating an efficient and profitable dairy farm, while at the same time both John, Brendan and the rest of the family are passionate about looking after the environment. Significant progress has been made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on the farm. They have reduced their chemical Nitrogen (N) use by 48% since 2020, and 87% of their chemical Nitrogen is NBPT protected urea. Trees are planted every year on the farm and hedges are allowed to grow up, and out, to maximise their value for biodiversity, but also carbon capture. The Nitrogen surplus on this farm is 91 kilogrammes of N per hectare, compared to the national average of 159 kg N / ha. A low N surplus significantly reduces the risk of nitrate leaching into waterways on the farm.

Speaking at the awards, EPA Director General, Laura Burke, who presented the top Award to the Walshs, said: "I whole-heartedly congratulate all 16 finalists on their achievement. I extend my congratulations in particular to the category and overall winners whose commitment to developing a sustainable future for the agri-sector was so evident to the judges. It is very encouraging to see this group of farmers embrace the environmental challenges facing the sector right now and to see such high uptake of key technologies, including reducing reliance on Nitrogen, the use of protected urea, better management of our hedgerows and greater implementation of actions to protect our water courses."

On behalf of the overall sponsor of the Awards, Michael Berkery, Chairman of FBD Trust said; "These inaugural Teagasc / FBD Environmental Sustainability Awards highlight farmers' commitment to environmental sustainability. We are proud to support these awards which recognise farmers who are making real strides in sustainability. Congratulations to John and Brendan Walsh and indeed to all 16 finalists who are shining examples of environmentally conscious farmers applying best practice on their farms. We wish them continued success." Professor Frank O'Mara, Director of Teagasc said; "This award is a wonderful celebration of the progress farmers have made, and are making, to improve environmental sustainability on their farms while continuing to produce high quality, nutritious food, in a profitable manner. Congratulations to all finalists and award winners. The agri-sector needs all farmers and all involved in the sector to firmly focus on improving water quality, reducing emissions, and enhancing biodiversity. The 16 finalists in these awards are excellent ambassadors for what is being done on family farms around the country."

The other award winners in the Teagasc / FBD Environmental Sustainability Awards were:

Enterprise winners:

- John and Brendan Walsh - Dairy
- Aidan Maguire, Meath – Dairy Beef
- Shane Keaveney, Roscommon – Suckler Beef
- Brian Nicholson, Kilkenny – Sheep
- Tom Barry, Cork – Tillage

Category Winners:

- Edwin Thompson, Tipperary (Dairy) – Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Ken Gill, Offaly (Suckler beef) – Enhancing Biodiversity
- Martin Crowe, Limerick (Dairy) – Improving Water Quality
- James O’Keeffe, Meath (Organic Tillage) – Improving Soil Health and Carbon

Other Finalists:

- Alan and Cheryl Poole, Wexford (Dairy)
- Blatnaid Gallagher, Galway (Sheep)
- Eamon and Donnchadh McCarthy, Waterford (Suckler Beef)
- Shane Fitzgerald, Waterford (Dairy)
- Richard Starrett, Donegal (Dairy)
- John Murphy, Cork (Dairy Beef)
- Michael McGuigan, Meath (Suckler Beef)