

Pat Joyce and Charlie Devaney.



Why a SMART plan is best

This Roscommon farm family is following an ambitious plan with timelines and clear goals

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All successful businesses set SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and with a Timeframe. Pat and Eileen Joyce, who run a suckler farm on the Roscommon/Galway border between Castlerea and Williamstown, have done just that and are following a simple plan with four clear targets in phase two to be fully implemented over five years with the gross margin target of €1,000/ha to be achieved by 2021.

The couple had been living in Dublin and decided to move home in 2006, so that they could rear their family in the country and help Pat's uncle, Paddy O'Connor, with his farm.

Almost immediately, Pat started an agricultural contracting business, to generate a second income stream,

which proved of great benefit when he started farming in his own right. "In 2009, I took over the farm which was in dry stock, at a relatively low stocking rate. This meant that the farm's entitlements were modest," says Pat.

Rather than waiting for the government to do something about his low value entitlements Pat set about improving his own situation. He decided on a two-phase approach.

Under the first phase, he would:

- Reseed the farm.
- Build a slatted shed.

Then, under a second phase, he would push up the output by:

- Maximising grass growth.
- Producing top quality silage.
- Keeping a tight calving interval/calving pattern.
- Breeding good quality stock.

Phase one

The first phase of the plan is now completed. Pat has reseeded over 80% of the farm (this is the target he had set) and he has built a four-bay slatted shed under TAMS II.

Phase two

The second phase of the plan has started over the last 12 months.

• Pat started measuring grass last year and joined a grass group. He is very lucky in that 95% of the farm is very dry which gives him great scope when farming during the shoulders of the year. The fields are mainly rectangular, which means they are easily divided into paddocks.

"Our stocking rate at 1.2LU/ha is far too low," says Pat. He plans to double his stocking rate over the next two years. "My aim is to have 30 suckler cows, sell half of the progeny as weanlings and half as stores at 18 months of age."

• Pat is determined to cut silage before the end of May and to take out paddocks if they get too strong for grazing: "Our silage in 2016 was 71 DMD and I hope to improve on that in 2017."

• Pat's calving interval is 371 days and his calves/cow ratio is 1.07. "My goal is to keep the calving interval short and to maintain the calves/cow figures for the next five years," says Pat. • Pat intends to produce really good quality cattle: "I will buy all replacements from local farmers and farmers in my local beef group. "My bull has a terminal value of €167, which should go a long way to producing the quality stock I want."