

Adding value: Dunany Flour Organic Farm

Growing, processing and marketing their organically produced grain has been a great success for this Louth farm family

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Alan McEvoy and Andrew Workman.

Andrew and Leonie Workman met at college. They were both studying agriculture at Seal-Hayne Agricultural College in Devon. In 1981, they returned to Dunany and took over the farm, which has been in Andrew's family for generations, located along the Co Louth coast overlooking the Irish Sea to the east and the Cooley Peninsula and the Mourne mountains to the north.

The Workmans established a tillage farm growing cereal crops. Increasing input costs squeezed the charm out of growing conventional cereals and the Workmans began to look at other options to improve the overall viability of the farm and their quality of life.

Why organics?

"There were several reasons why we started looking at organic production," says Andrew, admitting that: "I wasn't a great enthusiast for spraying and fertilising."

They gathered as much technical information as they could, visiting and speaking to organic farmers in Ireland and others as far away as France and Germany.

"After processing all we had learned, we entered the land into organic conversion in 2004 and it

achieved full organic status in 2006."

In the last 12 years, there have been many changes made with regards to the crops being sown and the routes to market.

"Initially we sold our grain into the animal feed market," says Andrew. "But with fluctuating grain prices we began looking into other ways of selling grain. We started growing oats for the organic porridge market which we still do."

Milling

"We realised that the way to survive was to add value by processing the grain ourselves and that's what we decided to do," says Leonie.

In the nearby town of Dunleer, there was Whiteriver Mill, a traditional stone water mill still in working order. With the help of the mill owner, the Workmans started milling and producing a nutty traditional extra

coarse flour from their wheat. Initially this was sold locally and within a year demand outstripped what the mill could produce.

"We began to see an opening in the market for other organic flours from grains such as rye and spelt," says Leonie. Again, they researched how to grow these crops, and with their "can do" attitude decided to grow spelt and rye. But these grains needed a faster more efficient milling system.

By chance, on their way home from their son's wedding in Poland they came across an electric stone mill being used by a German organic farmer. "We bought it as it suited the volume of grain that we were producing on the farm," says Andrew.

The Workmans also sourced a reconditioned stoneground mill for the extra coarse flour. Over time, they have invested in grain cleaners, gravity separators and a de-huller, all of which were sourced secondhand and are essential pieces of equipment for producing weed seed-free quality grain for milling.

Market development

With the flour selling very well locally, the rye and spelt growing and the greater capacity with the mill, the Workmans looked to expand their market.

"We did this by simply loading the car with samples and cold-calling to wholefood stores, artisan bakeries and restaurants," says Leonie.

They began to get great feedback and achieve a better financial return for their grains. Then the market

concentrate/straight feeds, breakfast cereal (mainly porridge oats) and organic aquaculture sector. For instance, it has been estimated that the existing production levels of oats grown for the organic porridge market (mainly Flahavans) accounts for only 40% of present demand.

At the end of 2018, the organic sector is made up of 1,700 farmers, with approximately 70% of them having a livestock enterprise on the farm, which leads to a significant demand

resented 0.8% of total cereal production in Ireland.

The sector is made up of approximately 161 extensively located farmers with the majority growing less than 10ha.

Demand and opportunities for organic cereals and pulses

The production of organic cereals in Ireland is not enough to meet the demand from the existing and future demand for the organic animal

Organic cereal and pulses production in Ireland

The area devoted to organic cereal and pulse production in Ireland is relatively small.

According to Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine figures, the area of organic cereal and pulse production in 2017 was 2,426ha, of which 1,181ha were oats, which rep-



Andrew Workman, Elaine Leavy, Leonie Workman and Alan McEvoy.

started to come to them with distributors and retailers wanting to have Dunany organic flour as part of their product range.

Their flours and berries are sold:

- In Dublin and the rest of Ireland through a distributor.
- Regionally in local shops and SuperValu stores.
- In Northern Ireland through a distributor.

They have developed a range of flours from the wheat, spelt and rye. Also included in their range are spelt berries.

Cropping on the farm

"To have grains and flour for their market, the Workmans need to have a cropping plan in place for the farm,"

says Alan McEvoy, their Teagasc advisor.

"This is done through crop rotation which is a key component of organic cereal production. It is the principal mechanism to provide crop nutrients; it is a major way to control pests/diseases along with maintaining soil structure, allows for spreading the fertility requirements and provides the capacity to build fertility."

There is no blueprint for rotations and they vary depending on the farm and the farmer's needs. The Workmans have implemented a rotation of a two-year fertility building phase with red clover followed by a five-year cycle of cereals including spelt, wheat, rye and oats. This planned rotation may vary depending on soil

type, weed burden and soil fertility.

Selling point

"The unique selling point of Dunany organic flour is that we are able to see the grains through from sowing to harvesting, milling to packaging and distribution," says Andrew. "Our only regret is that we didn't do it earlier!" concludes Leonie.

Currently, Andrew and Leonie Workman's farm is one of 12 organic farms in the 2019 Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM)/Teagasc organic demonstration farm programme, which showcases successful organic operators of various enterprises. Their farm walk is taking place on Wednesday 22 May at 2pm.

ture industry was excluded from this calculation.

Overall in Ireland, opportunities exist for import substitution of organic cereals and pulses for animal feed and the porridge market.

Teagasc will run QQI accredited organic production courses at Tullamore, Mallow, Athenry and Portlaoise from March through to July 2019.

Attendance at an accredited course is a mandatory requirement for all new applicants to the recently

re-opened Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) Tranche 2. All such applicants must have a course completed before 1st September 2019.

In addition, the course is a great way for farmers to explore the organic option if considering conversion.

Please inform any clients who may be interested.

See the link below to course details and how to book:

<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/training/>