

Challenge, opportunity, progression

Participants on Teagasc agricultural college courses gain practical experience, practical skills and, crucially, further opportunities say these current and former students

Louise Carroll

"Since I left the college, I have rented a farm and begun my own tillage enterprise. These are challenges I would have never undertaken if it hadn't been for the course," says Louise Carroll of Tullow, Carlow, who completed the Advanced Certificate in Machinery & Crop Management Level 6 at Teagasc Kildalton College.

"I loved the many practical elements, especially regarding machinery. We all got to plough and sow on our own and to operate different makes and models of tractor and machinery. We walked crops weekly to monitor for pests and diseases and we managed three different crops on our own as a group.

"There were a lot of really practical modules including crop production management, farm equipment fabrication, farm machinery maintenance and financial planning. The lecturers were always very involved and put in a lot of time and effort into each student.

"I was a bit apprehensive about the design and manufacture project, which was part of the farm equipment fabrication module, as I had never even picked up a welder before I started in Kildalton. But the lecturers were great and we had the best of equipment to complete our projects with. I am now confident using a welder and other equipment which I had never used prior to doing the course.

"The course included a 12-week

practical learning period on a host farm which I spent on a tillage and beef farm near Athy, Co Kildare. This was a great experience as I got to see tillage techniques and operate different types of machinery.

"A highlight for me was the study tour to England. We attended the LAMMA agricultural show in Peterborough as well as going to the JCB factory and an 8,500ac cereal and spud farm. That was an excellent trip.

"Since completing the course in Kildalton, I have progressed with my studies and am now completing year three of the BSc in Agriculture in Waterford Institute of Technology. I have enjoyed the challenge of progressing from a practical-based course to a more academic course of study."

John Smith

John completed a level five course in Poultry production at Teagasc, Ballyhaise. "What I found most positive about the course was that I could apply what I learned on a given night, in class, the following day on the farm and see instant benefits. The practical skills training was delivered on site visits to poultry units across the region. This was a major part of the course and an area that I learned a lot from.

"I farm with my parents and brother near Shercock on the Monaghan/Cavan border. The farm is suckler beef, but due to the uncertainty in this industry we decided to diversify into poultry broiler production. The op-



John Smith learned the skills to become an effective broiler finisher.

portunity arose to set up a 40,000-bird unit supplying a local poultry factory beside the town.

"I wanted to complete a course that would give me the skills and confidence to become an effective broiler finisher and make the most of the new enterprise. The timing worked out great as Teagasc started a Level 5 course delivered part-time by night in Ballyhaise in 2018. I was part of the first class to complete this course.

"The course was a very positive experience, with a good balance of theory in class and practical skills. Two areas I am particularly interested in are animal welfare and biosecurity. The course also covered different areas of poultry, including egg and duck production. I enjoyed learning about those systems too.

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"We will perfect the broiler unit that we have for a few years before deciding the next step for the family farm. Getting to this point has been a steep learning curve for my parents, my brother and myself, but one which we have enjoyed. The course has given me great confidence to drive on with the unit.

"Teagasc will start a Level 6 poultry management course later in 2019 and I intend to progress on to this course once it is available."

Paul Sheehan

"Managing grass is my favourite thing by a nice bit," says Paul Sheehan, who is now on the Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management having completed his Green Cert and the level 6 course in Dairy Herd Management at Teagasc Clonakilty College.

"My favourite part about the courses in my two years there was when in second year we used to measure the grass on the farm every Monday

» Continued on page 26



Paul Sheehan says that measuring grass was one of his favourite parts of the courses in Teagasc Clonakilty.

afternoon. I always had an interest in grass as I know this is the cheapest source of feed for your cows but had never really measured grass before, or used Pasturebase.

“Since then, I have been measuring grass weekly at home and I find it very beneficial. There is also a dairy discussion group for students at Clonakilty which is very good. You have a network of farmers your own age you can discuss a problem with and there will always be a solution. At the discussion group meetings, you will always learn something new. I found the level 5 course was a very good start on my road to farming. It covered all aspects to farming from financials to milking.

Ultimately, Sean says he hopes to farm in partnership with his father in Carraig na Bhfear, but he says he is open to any possibilities that include cows and grass!

“The great thing is that you are all the time building a network with fellow students, lecturers, and host farmers who you could contact, or who might contact you, about something in relation to cows. There’s a lot of potential opportunity in dairying and I think the Teagasc courses prepare you very well to avail of it.”

Eamon Comiskey

“I currently work full time for Kieran Pigs and have also taken over my family farm near Kilnaleck in Cavan. I went back to education at the age of 30 to learn how to run my farm better and more efficiently. The opportunity to do a level 5 pig course and progress to a level 6 Specific Purpose Certificate (Green Cert) allowed me to make efficiency changes to my home farm but also gave me a renewed confidence in my daily work on the pig unit.

“When I took over my family farm, we had 23 suckler cows, which I have since increased to 45. As I was working full-time and running my family farm, I was delighted I could do this course part-time, with most of the classes in the evening, so I did not need to take too much time off work.

“The Green Cert programme broadened my knowledge and decision making and it has inspired me to breed better-quality animals and keep a younger herd. I still have a lot of work to do to get my farm where I want it, but I feel this course has given me the ideas, ability and knowledge to get there. The Farm Business Planning module has given me new skills which allow me to manage more effectively.



Since then, I have been measuring grass weekly at home and I find it very beneficial



Eamon Comiskey says the Green Cert programme broadened his knowledge. This newborn calf is about to be tagged.

“Being part of a suckler/beef discussion group in second year was hugely beneficial in advancing my expertise and capabilities and I really enjoyed the farm walks on real commercial farms.

“I could compare what different farmers were doing at various times of the year to what I was doing. Some of this included calving, silage making and having cows in good condition for calving down.

“Probably one of the biggest things I have taken from this was the im-

portance of farm safety, especially during calving time. The class work gave me a greater understanding of the importance of paperwork and documentation in running a farm as a business. The skills I gained help me to keep on top of things, both financially and for the Department of Agriculture.

“For anyone thinking of doing their Green Cert, you will definitely gain practical knowledge that is easily applied into everyday farming and you will make friends for life.”

Courses

Agricultural courses at agricultural colleges

All Teagasc Level 5 and 6 programmes lead to a QQI award. The Teagasc full-time Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture and Teagasc Level 6 advanced certificate programmes are delivered at six agricultural colleges. While full-time courses in the main attract school-leavers, they also attract older learners who are interested in pursuing the full-time option.

Applications for the full-time Teagasc Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture course should be made online through the “Apply for Courses” option on the www.teagasc.ie homepage. Potential applicants should apply now.

Agricultural colleges also deliver Teagasc part-time and distance education Green Cert courses to adult learners. (The part-time and/or distance education Green Cert options are also delivered in Teagasc regional centres across Teagasc’s Advisory Regions).

All of the agricultural colleges have developed significant linkages with the higher education sector and depending on the agricultural college deliver substantial elements of Level 7 and 8 agricultural degree programmes for the higher education sector.

Teagasc-supported private agricultural colleges

Of the six agricultural colleges, three are owned by Teagasc (Ballyhaise, Co Cavan; Clonakilty, Co Cork and Kildalton, Co Kilkenny). The other three colleges are privately owned but supported by Teagasc. These colleges (Gurteen, Co Tipperary; Mountbellew, Co Galway and Salesian Pallaskenry, Co Limerick) deliver the same Level 5 and 6 full-time, part-time and distance education programmes as Teagasc colleges. As for Teagasc colleges, all three private colleges operate commercial farms to support their education activities. The overall network of six agricultural colleges has made a very valuable contribution to farmer education for more than 100 years.