Breeding future stars

Alan Hurley equine specialist
Taggag Rural Economy Development Programme

Jimmy Ryan hails from Kilnamack, Clonmel, Co Tipperary, and is a modest-scale but very successful horse breeder. Recently retired as principal at St Mary’s National School, Jimmy has always had an interest in horses and started breeding over 30 years ago.

“I got my first mare from the late Ted Keane in Cloneen, a brilliant horseman. My foundation mares were by Clover Hill which were crossed with either Cruising or Cavaliere Royale and kept the resulting fills which gave me an excellent genetic base,” says Jimmy. A modest man, Jimmy Ryan has bred horses of the highest quality including Electric Cruise who competed at the London Olympics in 2012. He bred the mare, grandmother, and great-grandmother of Electric Cruise.

The offspring from his Kilnamack broodmares have qualified for the RDS Dublin Horse Show on numerous occasions. When asked which mare has done the most for him as a breeder? Jimmy smiles and, without hesitation, says: “Kilnamac Sally (pictured), the mare that bred Electric Cruise and (pictured), the mare that bred Electric Cruise and (pictured) and the mare and the stallion’s progeny should also be consistent performers. Then select a stallion that will complement her; the mare and the stallion’s progeny should also be consistent performers.

“Your need to be realistic of what the mare is capable of producing. I go to Lanaken every three years and enjoy watching the jumping but in particular I study the catalogue and look to see if there are any stallions that are a little bit more prominent in producing show jumpers. I also attend the RDS young horse qualifiers every year and mark any notable stallions with several offspring as well as paying close attention to the dam lines.”

“There are several young stallions that are proven to jump which I would love to use but they are not proven as sires and when you are in the market of selling foals you need to have a proven pedigree,” Jimmy says. When picking a stallion Jimmy looks for four criteria: “Pedigree, conformation, stallion performance and the success of his progeny. Most of the stallions on the continent will tick all those criteria; similarly, those four criteria also apply when selecting your breeding mare,” says Jimmy. When it comes to selling foals, he says: “It is essential you sell into a yard where you know the foal will be produced to reach its true potential.” And what of Jimmy’s breeding plans? “To continue to breed horses of international standard using the top ranked sire I stabled on the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses. Now that I’m retired, I will consider keeping a few foals until they are three and see if they have a jump.”

Waterford sport horse breeders

In 2013, Jimmy joined the Waterford Sport Horse Breeders’ discussion group. There are over 35 members across east Cork, south Tipperary and Waterford.

“It’s invaluable because if I have a problem there is someone else who has also encountered the same issue. I can bounce ideas off other members to solve issues quickly and effectively and it also gives you a different perspective on things,” says Jimmy.

“The group is very passionate and we all have a strong desire to learn from each other’s product on systems and improve our business. Everyone has something of interest to contribute. This year as a group we took professional footage of all foals. The footage was subsequently uploaded on to Facebook and Irish Horse Gateway. This proved to be a successful sales tool as he has already sold two foals using this platform.”
Kilkenny dairy farm yields a welcome dividend

Tom Houlihan, Michel Somers and Richard Walsh
Teagasc Forestry Development Department, Teagasc Crops Environment and Land Use Programme

Michael Owens farms near Castlecomer/Clough in north Kilkenny, a strong hurling country. A land use decision taken by Michael’s late father, Denis, in 1989 has yielded a welcome forestry dividend.

“Myself and my brother Martin run a spring-calving dairy herd along with some beef cattle,” says Michael. The brothers milk 125 cows on a holding of almost 80ha. Michael is keen on grassland management and uses Norweigan Red straws to achieve hybrid vigour in the herd.

“We want to do the job well and move forward but we don’t believe in trying to maximise cow numbers for the sake of it. We try to do our best with our resources and there is certainly a role for forestry. With all the talk of carbon emissions, forestry will probably become even more important.”

Michael and Martin recently installed a DeLaval robotic system with two milking units side by side. Adjustments to this new automation was not straightforward. “I was pleased with the timber and the product breakdown was 45% sawlog, 37% pallet wood and the remainder going to pulp. That’s a welcome return from the forest,” says Michael.

Kilkenny dairy farmer Michael Owens.

Strong demand
With strong demand for timber at present, farm forest owners have a valuable crop on their land, “I was impressed with the timber and return from the forest,” says Michael. “It yielded pretty well, it was fairly straight and the product breakdown was 45% sawlog, 37% pallet wood and the remainder going to pulp. That’s a pretty decent forestry yield.”

Timber prices can vary over time and according to a range of factors such as tree quality, forest type, woodlot size, quality of access and from his training. “There was a little controversy at the time,” says Michael, “particularly as the fields had some road frontage. But my father had great foresight and having over seen thinning operations followed by the final harvest of the timber in October 2018 it was a great decision.”

The farm forest matured rapidly following two productive thinning nings in 2010 and 2014. The net productive area was 2.8ha. A accordance to Michael, “Our experience is that it has only added to the place.”

Michael continues: “We are very happy with the way the harvesting worked out. The whole job was done in three days, it has delivered over 750t (which converted to 820m³ freshly cut) and the price we will receive is about €35/t, perhaps even a bit more. We are lucky timber prices are strong at the moment. It will cost just over 10% of the money we receive to replant and put it back.”

Strong demand

Although the emphasis for the forestry returns. “When you are farming you have a lot of options for what you are going to do with money. I have four children and hopefully they will go to college.”

Many farmers like Michael have the potential to diversify their on-farm resource and future potential income streams. At the same, a growing forest can efficiently sequester carbon and can help in efforts to offset greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The existing broadleaf trees in the forest were retained and Michael will replant a further 10% through the site for environmental and aesthetic reasons. Michael can now make plans for his forestry returns. “When you are farming you have a lot of options for what you are going to do with money. I have four children and hopefully they will go to college.”

Many farmers like Michael have the potential to diversify their on-farm resource and future potential income streams. At the same, a growing forest can efficiently sequester carbon and can help in efforts to offset greenhouse gas emissions. Through whole-farm planning, forests can be integrated into existing farms and provide options on appropriate land parcels. Forestry premiums, combined with retained basic payments and tax-free returns generated from timber production, can diversify income streams and enhance family farm income.

Mortgage
For a younger farmer, forestry may provide an ideal way to help with the mortgage on a new family home or help towards sustainable farm investments. And for maturing farmers a forest can make an ideal pension pot. Michael is now looking forward to getting the forest planted again and seeing the next forest establish and rapidly grow, adding with a smile: “Hopefully when I am about 70 I will get some retirement money out of it!”

Teagasc forestry clinics in 2019

Teagasc will run a nationwide series of forestry advisory clinics between 21 January and 5 February, promoting the establishment and management of forestry as a sustainable and rewarding land use on Irish farms. These one-to-one clinics will be held in Teagasc offices around the country on specific dates, where a private individual consultation with an experienced forestry advisor can be arranged by appointment. The Forestry Programme offers landowners many options in relation to forest establishment with a range of attractive prices and annual premium categories available. A land use change to forestry, like any new farm enterprise, will raise many questions. A consultation with your Teagasc forestry advisor will provide independent and objective advice, empowering you to make informed decisions on many relevant issues including the following:

- Opportunities for farmers and landowners to diversify farm enterprises and make marginal land work for them.
- Interaction with other farm schemes, e.g. Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS).
- Available funding streams.
- How forestry can improve farm income and the environment.
- How to apply and get the job done first time.
- Managing the harvest and timber sales.

Although the emphasis for the Teagasc Forestry Advisory Service is on new planting, existing forest owners, regardless of age, can also avail of this opportunity to pick up valuable management tips. Prior booking of a site visit and a consultation is essential. Please bring maps and other relevant information on the day to optimise the advisory experience and outcome.

These clinics are held at various Forestry Programme offices around the country. For details of a clinic, taking place close to you, log on to: https://www.teagasc.ie/ask/forestry/news/2019/forestry-clinics-january-2019.php or contact your local Teagasc forestry staff.

These clinics provide an ideal opportunity for farmers and landowners to answer their forestry questions – don’t miss out.

Teagasc Forestry Development Department, Teagasc Crops Environment and Land Use Programme

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