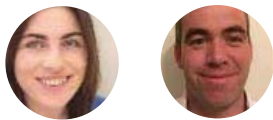


dairying

Start-up course a must when

Wherever you are on your 'journey' of transition to dairying, Teagasc can advise you. For those who have made the decision, this hands-on dairy start-up course is ideal



Martina Gormley and Pat Gowing
Dairy specialists, Teagasc Animal and Grassland Research & Innovation Programme

A piece of metal equipment sits surrounded by nettles in Eanna and Willie Galvin's farmyard near Raheenakeeran, Co Offaly. In fact, it's a redundant cauliflower harvester. As well as horticulture the family have operated tillage, pedigree sheep and a number of beef systems on their 200 acres. Now they are converting to dairying.

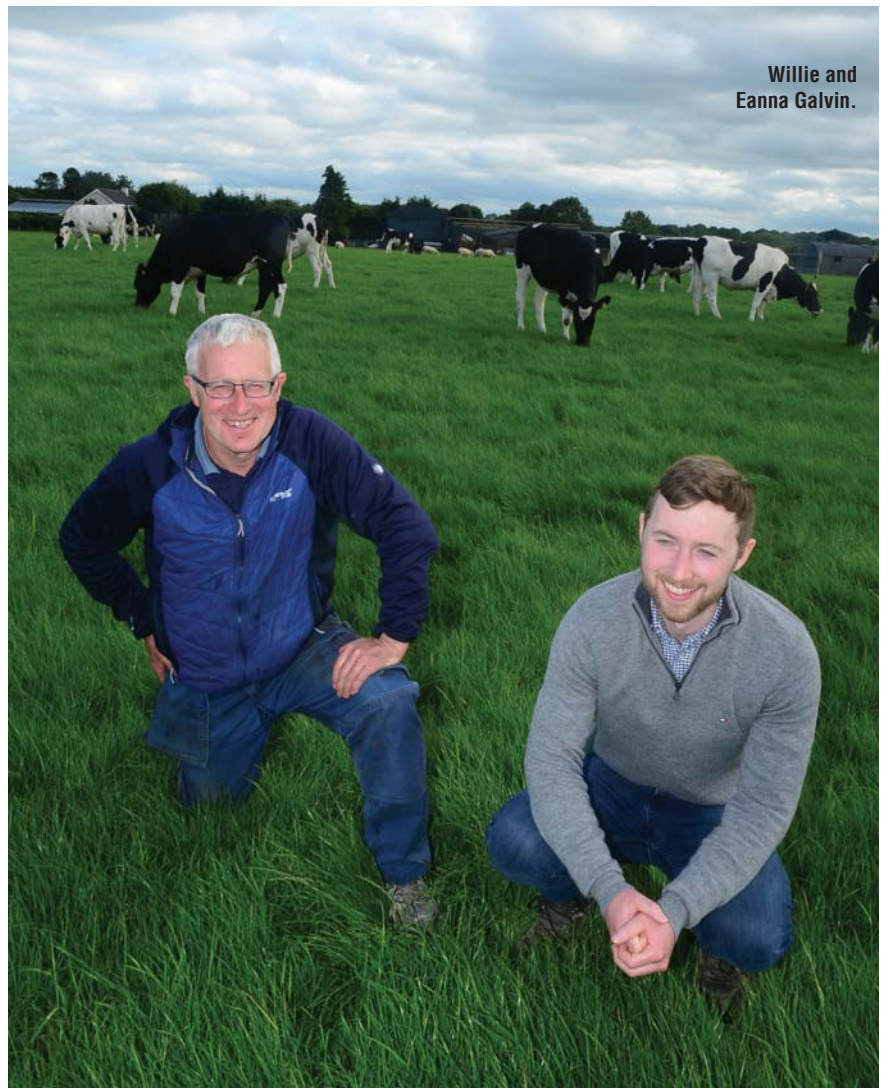
"We worked really hard to make our suckler cows and pedigree Lleyen sheep pay," says Willie. "We invested a lot in reseeded, roadways, etc. and while we were fairly profitable we simply weren't making enough money for the amount of time and work required."

Their road-to-Damascus moment came two years ago when they reviewed the profitability of each enterprise and confirmed what they already knew: that drystock compared very poorly with dairying in terms of profitability.

A number of the Galvins' neighbours had already converted to dairying and the family initially approached their Teagasc drystock advisor Mark Coyne to investigate the feasibility of switching.

"We discovered there was a lot of advice available to help us make the right choices during the transition," says Eanna.

"We considered buying robots but Teagasc dairy expansion advisor Patrick Gowing pointed out that our herd



Willie and Eanna Galvin.

at about 100 cows is too big for one and too small for two, so we are building a 20-unit herringbone parlour.

"We are currently part of the dairy start-up course which is led by Teagasc dairy advisor Jim Moyles," says Eanna.

"We are in regular contact with Jim and the other people on the course. It's hugely helpful when making decisions."

The Galvins are also participants on a Teagasc Grass10 Grazing Management Course led by James Mimmagh and John Douglas.

"If you are thinking of switching to dairying I would really recommend approaching Teagasc and doing the dairy start-up course, you'll learn a huge amount and make fewer mistakes," concludes Willie.

Strong demand

To meet strong demand, Teagasc will be offering the dairy start-up course

again this autumn. This is the third year that the course has been run and over 100 farmers have participated so far.

The first part of the course includes four training days which take place from late September to the end of November 2020. The first day of the course is on a dairy farm and covers animal breeding with particular emphasis on buying in the right stock.

Day two is also delivered on farm and concentrates on farmyard and grazing infrastructure with the main focus being to get the farmyard layout right from day one.

The farms hosting day one and two are chosen for their high performance in animal breeding, grassland management and animal health. These farms will also show excellent cashflow and farm profitability.

The third day is an indoor meeting which involves crunching the numbers and each participant gets to

getting into dairying

create their own three-year budget.

Speakers for the first three days will be a mix of local Teagasc dairy advisors and Teagasc dairy specialists.

On day four participants will get to meet Teagasc Moorepark researchers be it face to face or through a webinar depending on COVID-19 developments. Researchers will present the latest research on grass varieties, drainage, calf facilities, key profit indicators and workload management.

The second part of the course includes 10 discussion group meetings which will be held on a profitable farm that is practising excellent grassland, breeding and animal health practices. At these group meetings, participants will get to see the farm and cows at all the different stages throughout the year.

In-between these group meetings there will be one optional training day for anyone interested in robotic milking. This meeting will be held outdoors on a robotic farm located centrally to all courses.

There will also be a one-day training workshop on milking machines, routines and milk quality. This workshop will be held, where possible, in the nearest agricultural college to the course locations.

The training day will be scheduled to a time that is suitable to the majority of the group.



Teagasc advisor James Mimmagh and Eanna Galvin review construction work for the Galvins' new dairy facilities.

Who should attend this course?

This course is tailored to individuals who are seriously interested in converting to dairy farming and have already discussed in detail, with their advisor, the financial implications and rewards from converting.

Key requirements before going into dairy farming or attending this course:

- You enjoy farming.
- You have a positive can-do attitude.
- You plan to follow research-based knowledge, not perceptions.
- You have a scale that will generate a reward that you are happy with.
- You use accurate assumptions to calculate profit potential.

How to book a place on this course

From 1 August to 10 September, you can add your contact details on www.teagasc.ie/dairystart-up

Here you will find more details including a course outline for each day. You can also contact your local Teagasc office and leave your contact details.

A member of staff can add your details online for you.

After the deadline of 10 September specific course locations will be decided and provided your details have been entered online by yourself or Teagasc you will be contacted to discuss course content, locations and registration.



Dairy Start-Up Course 2020



“ Converting to dairy involves a major commitment and sizeable capital outlay...

You need to be sure you are making the right decisions! ”



Request a Callback
www.teagasc.ie/dairystartup



Continued on p12

FARMER PROFILE

Dara and Charles Kileen from Eyrecourt, Co Galway, started dairy farming in 2019 with 95 in-calf heifers and have increased to 153 cows milking this year. Prior to this, Dara and his father were farming 500 ewes and 120 beef cattle.



Dara Kileen.

Why consider dairy farming?

The decision to convert to dairying was based on improving work-life balance and also to increase farm profitability so that the farm would support a second farm income. These were the main drivers for this conversion.

Challenges converting to dairying

- Understanding the business plan and getting comfortable with the figures.
- Managing existing drystock with dairy stock and the new build.
- Learning a new skillset.

To overcome these challenges, Dara found joining the Aurivo focus farm programme, attending discussion group meetings, using the Teagasc farm expansion programme and having other dairy farmers to contact, was essential to the success of the conversion.

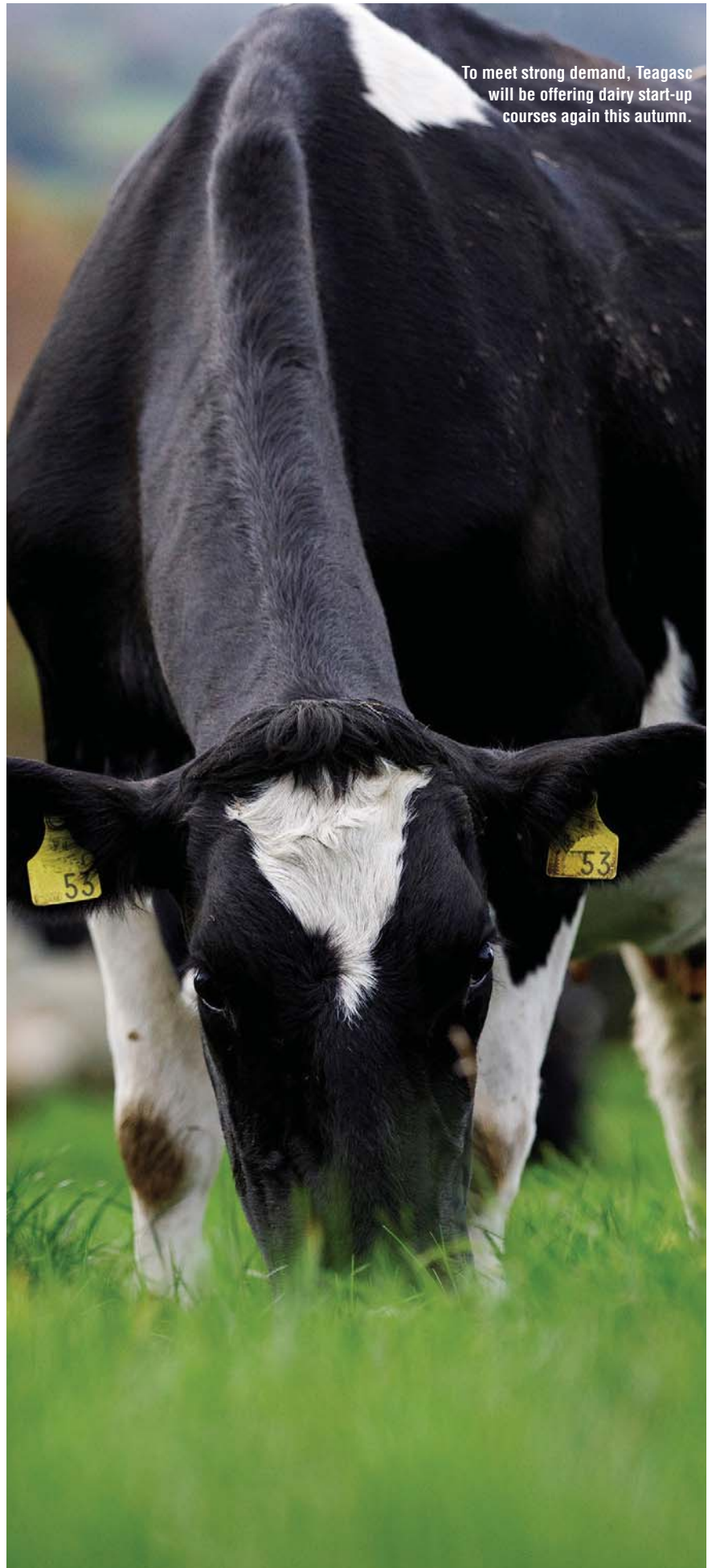
“I used all help and advice that I could get and I suppose I implemented what I needed from each,” says Dara.

“I joined a dairy discussion group prior to starting dairying and this group came to the farm and they were a great help in the farmyard planning.”

Advice to anyone starting dairying

- Take your time.
- Don't compromise on stock quality over price.
- Have an accountant that you trust to discuss business structures and reliefs.
- Have a strong business plan that you understand.
- Have a good working relationship with your bank, where you feel comfortable to call or email with questions.

“For us, the improvement in work-life balance is a massive benefit from converting to dairying. When we were drystock farming we were very busy in the spring lambing down 500 ewes.



To meet strong demand, Teagasc will be offering dairy start-up courses again this autumn.

The difference now is that we can afford to pay for help in the busy times. “This year, we have one part-time person who works 20 hours per week and we also have a college student who works with us at weekends and when on leave from college. My father also helps out on the farm, so all in all including myself there are two full-time people working on the farm. This means I am not tied to the farm and can take time off from the farm.”

“ Converting your farm to dairying takes time and a lot of planning. Developing a good capital budget for the project is essential

Are there any negatives to dairy farming?

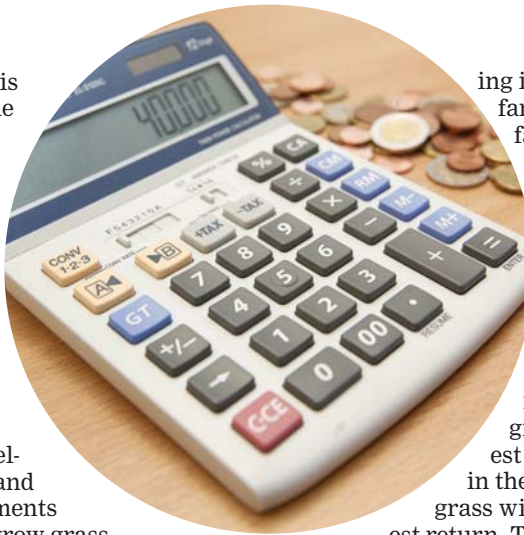
“To be honest so far, I can't think of any negatives. The plan that was initially put in place is coming together nicely. One downside in comparison to drystock could be the level of borrowings.

“I did find this daunting in the initial stages of conversion but I am not overly concerned now. This is because I have bought the right stock and invested money into a farmyard that allows for excellent cow flow and land improvements and that will grow grass which is by far our cheapest feed.”

Pat Gowing, Teagasc farm expansion specialist, has been working with new entrants to develop their farm business plan since quotas were abolished.

“Converting your farm to dairying takes time and a lot of planning. Developing a good capital budget for the project is essential. An underfunded business plan can struggle with cash-flow as extra cash will be required to finish the development of your farm.

“Every farm is unique and will have different requirements to convert. Some units will have very good graz-



ing infrastructure on farm while other farms could require up to €800/ac of investment to bring the grazing platform up to scratch.

“Build your budget by starting with the items that will give you the highest return. Investing in the right stock and grass will yield the highest return. Too often, a large proportion of the budget is sucked up in the parlour or housing which leaves a smaller budget for stock and grass. This will negatively impact on your plan as you have not invested your money where you will get the largest returns.

“Converting your farm is a long-term investment. Spread the new borrowings over the maximum time you are allowed, to help protect cash flow in the start-up years. In the early years, output will be building gradually because your herd will be young and growing. During this time, protecting your cashflow is key.”

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