The farmers in the 2019-20 cohort of the Teagasc/UCD Michael Smurfit Business School course in Business Strategy. Back row (from left): Bernard Ging (Laois), Michael Clancy (Cork), JP Hammersley (Tipperary), Edward Egan (Teagasc mentor), Micheal Doyle (Carlow), Eavaun Carmody (Tipperary) and Donal Brennan (Carlow). Middle row, from left: Thomas Fitzgerald (Carlow), David Henry (Sligo), Ciaran Hickey (Teagasc mentor), MJ Scallan (Wexford) and Shane Crean (Cork). Front row (from left): Edward Treanor (Monaghan), Michael O'Callaghan (Limerick), Catherine Millerick (Tipperary), Cathal Herlihy (Waterford) and Harry Lalor (Laois). Absent from the picture: Aoife Flanagan (Meath) and Patrick Greenan (Monaghan).

Teagasc/UCD Michael Smurfit course in Business Strategy

The sixth cohort of farmers recently completed the Teagasc/UCD Michael Smurfit course in Business Strategy. The level 8, fully accredited, course challenges participants to create a strategy for their own business regardless of their enterprise. This year's class included farmers with dairy, beef, tillage and poultry as their primary enterprises.

"The course is challenging but it made us think outside the box and I'd say we are more clear in our decisions about where we are going down the line," says Catherine Millerick, a dairy farmer from Kellenaule in Tipperary.

The course is based on "executive training" so there is a high degree of interaction between course leaders and participants. A range of subjects related to strategy are covered in the course including strategy formulation, management of oneself and others, investment, etc. "I found the material on managing and preparing for negotiations extremely useful," says Catherine Millerick.

The course is based on two modules, one of three days and another of two days which are held in a hotel where the participants stay overnight.

There is a gap of four weeks between the modules. The modules are held in a hotel with participants staying overnight.

Between the modules, students work on their individual strategies with guidance from Teagasc mentors.

The course will be run again in autumn 2020 (a slightly less busy time for many farmers) and Teagasc has partnered with Macra Skillsnet to generate partial financial support for participants. The course is sure to be full this year, so to find out more and reserve a place, please contact Mark.Moore@teagasc.ie or ring 087-417 9131.

Teagasc scientists investigating possible whiskey 'Terroir'

Irish whiskey (uisce beatha Éireannach) is one of the oldest spirit drinks in Europe and is a geographical indication product approved by the EU, which is a designation used to identify a product whose quality and reputation is linked to its geographical origin.

Although each step of the distilling process plays a vital role in establishing the flavour complexity of the whiskey, the cereal crop imparts a distinctive sensory profile, which is allegedly directly attributable to its geographical origin and therefore may impart a "terroir" aspect to whiskey.

"Terroir" is the set of all environmental factors that affect a crop's phenotype, including unique environment contexts, farming practices and a crop's specific growth habitat. Collectively, these contextual characteristics are said to have a character and the term "terroir" refers to this character.

"Terroir" forms the basis of the French wine appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) system, which is a model for wine appellation and regulation in France and around the world. However, "terroir" has not yet been established for whiskey but researchers in Teagasc are attempting to answer this question as part of an Enterprise Ireland Innovation partnership with Waterford Distillery.

– Teagasc TResearch

BovINE beef network launched

A new trans-European beef network, called BovINE, has been launched by Teagasc in conjunction with EU research and farming partners. BovINE will stimulate the exchange of knowledge and ideas at an international level under the headings of: socio-economic resilience, animal health and welfare, production efficiency and meat quality and environmental sustainability.

Teagasc tendered and was awarded funding of €2m by the European Union to develop this project, which will be shared with 17 other EU partners. The BovINE project will engage with beef farmers from nine member states, covering 75% of the suckler cow population in Europe and 70% of beef output.

Focused on responding to farmer-identified needs, the BovINE network will provide beef farmers with access to information about innovations that could improve sustainability of their farms and the wider industry.

Professor Maeve Henchion, head of the Department of Agrifood Business and Spatial Analysis of Teagasc, and BovINE coordinator: "We will ask farmers to identify their most urgent needs and we will respond to these needs in two ways.

"Firstly, drawing on the international network of our 17 partners which include farmer associations, breeder associations, agricultural advisory organisations and applied research institutions, we will look to identify and share examples of solutions used by other farmers across the EU-wide network.

"Secondly, drawing on the same network, we will identify solutions from research results that have not yet been put into widespread practice. Any proposed solutions that have not yet been applied in practice will be subject to scrutiny in a demonstration farm context before being promoted for widespread adoption."

Kevin Kinsella, director of livestock with the Irish Farmers Association, said: "The project will provide a structure that will enable us to learn more and improve, and share our experiences with other European beef farmers. We are committed to working with Teagasc and many European farm organisations and research colleagues through BovINE, to help Irish and European beef farmers."

Join the mailing list for project news at bovine@minervacomms.net

Requirements for energy, protein, vitamins and minerals are quantified based on inputs from the user describing the cow, her environment and her current level of milk production.
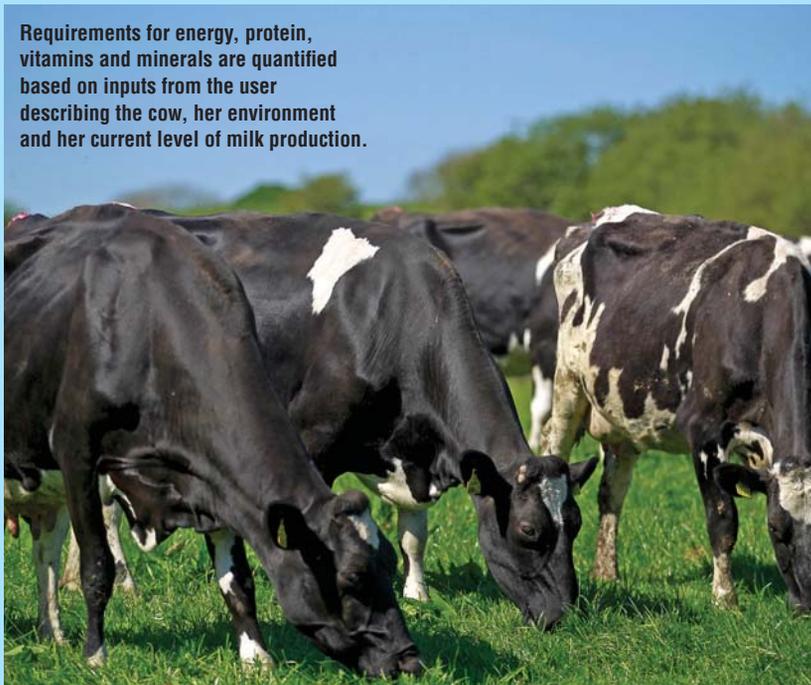
The true nutritive value of grazed pasture

Ruminants have a unique ability to convert the most abundant human-inedible organic compound on earth, cellulose, into human-edible food. A primarily pasture-based diet involves the consumption of homegrown human-inedible forage, which minimises environmental impact and supports a resilient business model for the farmer.

There are, however, opportunities to increase the efficiency and productivity of pasture-based systems by incorporating more nutrients (i.e. nitrogen and carbon) into milk and meat products. A Teagasc collaborative project with Cornell University is exploring new nutritional management tools for pasture-based dairy production systems to increase the capture of nutrients into milk.

Nutritional modelling provides greater understanding of the balance between nutrient supply from the diet and the animal's requirements. The Cornell Net Carbohydrate and Protein System (CNCPS) is a tool that is used widely for formulating dairy cow diets in the US, with growing usage across the world.

Requirements for energy, protein, vitamins and minerals are quantified based on inputs from the user describing the cow, her environment and her current level of milk production.

The supply of each of these nutrients is also quantified based on the animal's intake and the characteristics of the diet the cow is consuming. The CNCPS utilises novel feed chemistry techniques to characterise each feed and hence the cow's diet.

In pasture-based systems, there are a number of dietary strategies available to enhance the capture of nutrients. To select the optimal strategy, however, knowledge of how the diet interacts with the host and the nutrients it supplies is critical. The CNCPS can help to provide this increased understanding through the combination of mathematical modelling allied with in-depth feed chemistry analysis.

These new tools can provide a greater understanding of the nutrition of cows grazing pasture-based diets and also provide far-reaching insights; for example, how to optimise concentrate supplementation of cows grazing on pasture-based systems or to describe future plant breeding objectives.

Improved swards, optimised for traits such as reduced ruminal digestion of plant AA, could increase net human food production, lower environmental impacts and increase the financial resilience of pasture-based systems.

– Teagasc TResearch