

A pioneer in forestry and broadcasting

Michael Somers
Forestry advisor,
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In times past, the words of broadcaster Michael Dillon were gospel in the farming community. Few have reached this kind of legendary standing, yet in the Premier county, one man has achieved similar broadcasting status in his lifetime – Jim Finn from Ballycahill.

For 17 years, Jim has been the voice of farming in Tipperary. Last year, he increased his reach by adding the Farm Focus on Clare FM. But once you scratch the surface, you find the farming king of the microphone has many layers.

His experience with farming goes back over 60 years, from his time helping his father on their mixed farm near Thurles. Jim attended school in the town before going to secondary school at Mungret in Limerick. He smiles as he describes hurling in a rugby school. Many students excelled at both.

When he finished in education, Jim started farming, milking 22 cows, rearing calves, finishing steers and growing barley for Guinness and sugar for the factory in Thurles. Eventually, he concentrated on growing potatoes and cattle. His extensive farming experience has stood to him in his media career.

Rural development

Jim's interests are broad. He has a deep involvement in GAA and drama, two voluntary organisations that are still cornerstones of life in rural Ireland. He has held positions in both areas, as well as at the local co-op.

Jim has a passion for rural development and says his involvement in the local Leader Company in Tipperary is his greatest achievement.

"I was chair, and we were able to bring the Leader program to many communities. Tipperary has many artisan food producers, community development projects and other developments thanks to Leader. Teagasc and the Options program in particular, also played a massive role."

Jim is currently chair of the Irish Local Development Network CLG



(ILDN). This is the representative body for Ireland's local development companies. These 49 not-for-profit groups build inclusive, vibrant communities and better life chances for people in every part of Ireland.

They assist communities and disadvantaged persons/groups with personal development and well-being, social inclusion, employment training and placement, enterprise and social enterprise, community development, environment, and climate action.

Forestry

Jim is a pioneer and advocate for forestry in Tipperary: "My father had a great interest in trees. He believed in planting them for a pension and that's what he did."

In 1995, Jim planted 9ha around his house with Sitka spruce: "There's a reason I planted land outside my front door. It was wet. And very difficult to farm. The forest has been a huge addition to our farm. We got the establishment grant, and we received



Jim Finn and Michael Somers examine his forest with the 16th century Ballinahow castle, which is on Jim's farm, in the background.

the 20 years of premium.”

The site has been thinned twice. “I won't pretend I was happy with the price for first thinning,” says Jim.

“But I see now the value that is added to the crop. We are in the home straight. Timber price is up globally. But even if it falls, we will leave it. It will come around again.

“We follow a very genuine approach to the management of the forest. If we decide to do another thinning, really it must be to increase the percentage of sawlog. That is where the money is. The more sawlog you have, the better the return. It's that simple.”

“We heat our house with the less valuable wood and sell timber for pallets and sawlog. For any farmers coming up to clear-fell, my advice is to get the felling licence early. There's a lot of talk about licensing at the moment. Just be prepared. And don't be afraid to cut when the price is right or indeed to wait if it's not.

“I have grown barley, and a forest is not like a crop of barley. It can be

cut at any time once it's ready. It's a once-in-a-generation crop, and when it comes in, it certainly pays. But you must be prepared to do your homework. There's no use saying the dog ate my homework in the real world.”

Jim regularly walks his forest plantation. Since the second thinning, he has noticed an increase in vegetation in the forest.

“Sitka spruce gets a lot of bad press. But, once thinned, there's no shortage of vegetation and birdlife there. Red squirrels, in particular, are here and that's something positive.”

Radio

Jim took over from Tom O'Dwyer of Teagasc on Tipp FM's Ag Report.

“Tom has moved on to greater things, and I'm delighted I followed him as I love it,” says Jim.

“One of my most memorable interviews was with Lord Plumb in the UK. Lord Plumb was before his time in speaking about food miles. He devised the Fife diet.

“This was a pioneering project that encouraged people to grow and eat local food (produced within 50 miles of Fife) and reduce their carbon emissions footprint. Over 6,000 people signed up and it is one of the most significant food projects in Europe.

“The basics of the job have not changed.

“Of course, the recording and technical aspects of radio are ever-changing. But radio is a passion that I really enjoy.”

Jim sees farming changing. Since he has taken over on Farm Focus on Clare FM, Jim says “The Burren Project” is one of the most impressive developments in farming, devised by farmers for farmers who have a desire to promote one of the wonders of the world.

“Agriculture in the two counties is similar in many ways but different in others. But it's always important that we leave a positive legacy for the next generation,” he concludes.