

Edited by Amy Quinn



Welcome to the September edition of the Teagasc Pig Newsletter! This month, we had the pleasure of meeting many producers and industry representatives at the National Ploughing Championship 2024 in

Ratheniska, Co. Laois. It was a fantastic opportunity to showcase our industry and highlight the employment opportunities it offers. Thank you to everyone who took the time to visit our stand!

As we look ahead, we are in the final stages of preparation for this year's Teagasc Pig Farmers' Conference, scheduled for October 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Horse and Jockey Hotel, Co. Tipperary, and October 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Farnham Estate Spa & Golf Resort, Co. Cavan. The event will commence at 12:30 pm on both days, with a light lunch

provided. We have an exciting line-up of guest speakers and Teagasc staff ready to share valuable insights, so be sure to check out the program and further details later in this newsletter.

In this edition, Michael McKeon discusses the benefits of incorporating rye into pig diets, emphasising how it fosters better cooperation between pig and tillage producers while enhancing economic viability. Additionally, Gerard McCutcheon highlights the crucial period of weaning for piglets and some practices that can reduce post-weaning stress and improve overall performance.

We hope you enjoy this month's articles and we look forward to seeing you at the conference!

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## Growing Rye – A win-win for tillage & pig producers

Michael Hennessy & Michael McKeon

Pig production is one of the main users of Irish cereals and the pig manure resulting from this feed can be an important nutrient source for tillage crops. Opportunities for greater co-operation between the two sectors can lead to a stronger bio-circular economy, with resultant economic benefits for both parties. One of these 'potential opportunities' is to increase the amount of rye being grown and used in Irish pig diets.

Winter rye has a number of advantages for a tillage farmer as it gives growers the option of lengthening the rotation before returning to a break crop. Rye can produce high yields in a first cereal slot and also fits well into the second cereal slot to give a higher yield than winter barley. In this rotational position farmers can take advantage of rye's take-all tolerance. Production costs of winter rye are comparable to those of winter barley but output is higher due to higher grain and straw yields.

Recent research on using rye in pig finisher diets in Ireland carried out by Peadar Lawlor, concluded that growth rates were excellent and that rye can

be considered a safe ingredient for use in finisher pig diets. Based on the chemical analysis, the forecast value of rye in the diet is 94% of the value of wheat. See his podcast [here](#) on rye in growing-finisher pigs. It has been incorporated in pig diets in Denmark for many years, however its usage in Ireland has been quite low due to a lack of availability.

In 2024, there were 2,720 hectares of rye grown, an increase of nearly 1,000 hectares compared to 2023. With an average yield of 10t/ha there is a potential of ~25,000 tonnes available in 2024. There is a growing interest among tillage farmers in rye as it is considered reasonably easy to grow, suffers from less disease and has a lower nitrogen requirement.

Tillage farmers across the country will grow more rye if there is greater demand and from a risk perspective Irish pig producers are always looking to reduce their sole reliance on the limited 2-3 grain sources in pig diets. Therefore it makes sense for the tillage and pig sector to grow and use more rye, some might even say it's a 'win-win' situation.

## Reducing stress at Weaning

Gerard McCutcheon

Pigs at weaning have great potential for growth; however, they are very vulnerable at this time and some of this potential can be lost if conditions are not correct. The impact of incorrect management

at the early stage of life may lead to problems post-weaning.

In the wild piglets are mixing with other litters from two weeks of age onwards. They fight very

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little and spend a lot of time rooting the ground and eating roughage or fibre such as grass, and/or other plants in the area where they live. When they are completely weaned they are well over nine weeks of age.

In our indoor systems we had an average weaning age for piglets of 27 days in 2000 and this figure has now increased to 31 days in 2023 (reference: Teagasc Profit Monitor). The weaning age is an average figure so this means that back in 2000 although the weaning age was reported to be 27 days some piglets were being weaned as young as 21 days on some farms. Now our weaning age has increased to 31 but similarly this still may allow some piglets to be weaned below 28 days. By weaning an older piglet we are giving the piglet a better chance to thrive as their digestive tract is more developed, and, they are more likely to have consumed a greater amount of solid feed in the farrowing room.

Weaning is a huge transition in the life of the piglet. The pig goes through a number of different changes from feed changes, to a new housing environment, and new pen mates. Inevitably some level of fighting occurs as the group “pecking

order is established”. This may be overcome somewhat by allowing piglets mix in the farrowing rooms. A small number of farms have started allowing litters mix with other litters in the farrowing rooms. There are a number of advantages to doing this. If you can allow the groups that are to be weaned intermingle (by leaving the sow in her crate but allowing the piglets to mingle in the groups that they are going to be weaned with) – it reduces the level of fighting post weaning and also seems to encourage greater creep intake, as the pigs at weaning are heavier.

Another development that is on the horizon is to farrow sows in rooms and then wean the sows out of the room (at normal weaning time) but leave the piglets in the pens until they are ready to go onto finisher feed. Effectively the farrowing room is now the weaner section also. This is now beginning to happen throughout Europe, with the aim of reducing the stress on the piglets and achieving a better feed performance throughout the pigs’ lifetime. While it sounds far-fetched – it may be worth considering in future developments on farms (especially where farrowing pens are being designed for loose lactation in the future).

## 30<sup>th</sup> Teagasc Pig Farmers’ Conference: Marking a milestone

**Amy Quinn**

The 30<sup>th</sup> Teagasc Pig Farmers’ Conference is set to take place on October 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Horse and Jockey Hotel in County Tipperary, followed by a session on October 23<sup>rd</sup> at Farnham Estate, Cavan. The conference will commence at 12:30 PM on both

days, with a light lunch provided for all attendees. This annual event aims to bring together stakeholders from across the pig farming sector, encouraging attendees to connect with fellow producers and engage with the latest

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developments from the Teagasc Pig Development Department. Mark your calendars—this is an event you won't want to miss!

This year's conference features an impressive line-up of invited speakers, each bringing a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the discussions on the day:

## Hans Bundgaard, DVM

Hans Bundgaard, a Consultant Pig Veterinarian and co-founder of Porcus ApS in Denmark, is a prominent figure in pig consultancy. With extensive experience working with pig farms across Europe and Asia, Hans will address the critical topic of cross-fostering and nurse sow management. He will emphasise the importance of reducing pre-weaning mortality in piglets through optimal fostering techniques, ensuring adequate colostrum intake, and effectively managing nurse sows. His insights will be invaluable for producers looking to improve piglet care and minimise infection risks on their farms.

## Pedro Nonay

Pedro Nonay brings over 36 years of experience in the agricultural commodities sector, with a rich academic background in Sociology, Law, and Political Science. He is involved in consultancy, advisory services, and has co-authored a publication on geopolitical trends. At the conference, Pedro will discuss Geopolitical Conflicts & Agro-Trade, focusing on navigating global shifts, food security, and the challenges facing the industry today.

## Dr. Elizabeth Ball

Dr. Elizabeth Ball, a Senior Scientific Officer within

the Monogastric Research Group at AFBI, has led several impactful research projects relevant to the pig industry. Her research focuses on optimising nutrient utilisation of both conventional and novel feed ingredients, as well as reducing the environmental impact of pig and poultry production. Elizabeth will present on strategies for lowering nitrogen excretion from pig production, providing insights that are crucial for sustainable farming practices.

## Additional Presentations

In addition to the keynote speeches, the conference will include a presentation celebrating 30 years of the Teagasc Pig Farmers' Conference, highlighting the content of past conferences and the significant progress made over the years.

Another talk will focus on the importance of monitoring empty days and overall breeding performance, highlighting how reducing non-productive days through effective management practices can significantly boost both profitability and productivity.

Teagasc & the IFA, will present an overview of the WelFarmers project, which aims to identify challenges facing pig farmers and promote best practices in four critical welfare areas. This initiative employs a bottom-up approach, collecting insights from farmers and stakeholders to share solutions across Europe, particularly in light of future changes to EU pig welfare legislation.

Additionally, there will be a presentation addressing feed conversion efficiency (FCE) on pig farms, which will focus on practical strategies to



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tackle low-hanging fruit that can enhance overall farm productivity.

This year's Teagasc Pig Farmers' Conference is set

to be a valuable opportunity for learning and networking within the pig farming sector. We look forward to welcoming you all.

## CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



### THE 30TH ANNUAL PIG FARMERS' CONFERENCE: 30 YEARS OF TECHNICAL INSIGHTS & INNOVATION

Ciarán Carroll & Amy Quinn, Teagasc



### GEPOLITICS & AGRI-COMMODITIES: NAVIGATING GLOBAL SHIFTS, FOOD SECURITY & INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

Pedro Nonay, Global Commodity Expert, Switzerland



### EMPTY DAYS & THE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Louise Clarke, Teagasc



### WELFARMERS: A BOTTOM UP APPROACH TO FUTURE CHALLENGES

Amy Quinn & Ciarán Carroll & Edgar Garcia Manzanilla, Teagasc & Sarah Hanley, IFA



### LOWERING NITROGEN EXCRETION FROM PIG PRODUCTION

Elizabeth Ball, AFBI, United Kingdom



### PICKING THE LOW HANGING FCE FRUIT

Michael McKeon, Laura Boyle & Gerard McCutcheon, Teagasc



### CROSSFOSTERING & NURSE- SOW MANAGEMENT

Hans Bundgaard, Porcus, Denmark



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## Teagasc at WAFL 2024 & EAAP 2024



The 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Welfare Assessment of Animals at Farm Level (WAFL) 2024 and the 75<sup>th</sup> European Association for Animal Production (EAAP) 2024 were recently held in Florence, Italy. WAFL took place on August 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, while EAAP ran from September 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>. Both events are significant dates in the international farm animal research calendar, with

numerous Teagasc staff and students presenting their latest research, chairing sessions and representing several European-funded projects. Notably, Teagasc PDD staff - Laura Boyle, Keelin O'Driscoll and Amy Quinn - had the honour of organising WAFL 2024, marking a significant event in the international farm animal welfare research community.

## Ploughing 2024

The National Ploughing Championship took place in Ratheniska, Co. Laois from September 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>. Over the three days, it was a fantastic opportunity to meet the many producers who stopped by to say hello, while also showcasing our industry and highlighting the employment opportunities it offers to the general public.



**For more information:**

Please visit our webpage at:  
<https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/pigs/>

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