

equine

Woodhill stud joins the Signpost stable

We meet Paul Beecher who is based at Tallow in Co Waterford where he operates the first equine unit to join the Teagasc Signpost Programme

Sean Keane, Equine Specialist, Teagasc Rural Economy Development Programme.

On arrival at Woodhill Stud, you immediately see the level of professionalism and attention to detail which Paul Beecher brings to his farm. His business model includes breeding top class showjumpers or buying and producing them to the best of their ability.

Paul grew up only 15 minutes away at his father's Loughnatousa Stud. His love of horses started early and he holds the record as the youngest rider ever to have jumped in a competition at the RDS. He was just seven at the time.

In 2012, Paul's finest hour came when he won the Hickstead Derby on their home-produced Loughnatousa WB. After spending time in Belgium, Paul returned to set up at Woodhill Stud five years ago.

The plan was to act as a sister stud to the home farm Loughnatousa and yet be his own project. The farm activities include breeding, rearing and training of showjumpers.

There are 30 horses on 38 acres of land, 16 stables and six loose pens for young stock. There is an indoor and outdoor all weather arena, horsewalker and a gallop.

Why join the Signpost Programme?

After attaining his Green Cert, Paul says that he could see how important the environment and sustainability were for the future. It was always his plan to farm and do his bit for the environment: "And I feel that working with Teagasc and the Signpost Pro-

gramme will have a positive impact on the sustainability of the farm into the future.

"As part of the Signpost Programme, a sustainability plan will be developed for the farm outlining the key actions that need to be taken to improve farm environmental sustainability. The main focus areas will be around reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing biodiversity on the farm and improving soil health.

"We will also ask the local Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) advisor to come and assess what I am doing to protect water quality on the farm."

Paul says that the main areas of focus include:

- Improving soil fertility, in particular soil pH and P & K indices.
- Improving soil health with a particular emphasis on assessing soil compaction on the farm.
- Developing an animal health plan.
- Enhancing biodiversity on the farm.

He adds that, at present, AgNav does not have a model for calculating the total emissions from the farm.

What improvements have you implemented or planned?

Paul says that he wants to get guidance on soil health on the farm: "We have tried to keep nitrogen fertiliser levels down in the past and we will continue to do that and with the help of soil samples we will get greater precision in terms of P and K requirements. Once we have those we will put a plan in place."

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ter as well as being positive for the environment and wildlife," he says. "We have also put up a number of bird boxes as we are keen to promote bird welfare."

Good ventilation and hygiene is very much to the fore around the stabling and the farm in general. This allows for a cleaner environment with plenty of air changes within the stabling area allowing horse health to prosper which is high priority and ensuring that no stone is left unturned in terms of doing the best for them.

Animal health is also key and Paul has a worming regime in place, vaccinations up to date, regular dentist checks for the horses and regular contact with a nutritionist who advises on the different diets of the horses on the farm.

When it comes to pedigrees of his broodmares, Paul says he likes his



mares to have competed to a high level themselves. “Mares will have competed to 1.40m level and therefore have the ability to produce top class

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Correct conformation is a must for Paul, whether breeding or buying in stock as he feels this is vital for his business. A lot of thought and planning goes into his mating plan and stallion selection.

Vision for the future

The current model is to breed and buy for excellence. To have a high standard of quality in terms of horses and facilities and to be sustainable into the future and have a niche in the market.

“I will always do what is best for the horses and develop them along at a pace that suits them,” says Paul. “I sell from five-years old plus and it could be up to an eight year project with a horse to realise their full potential and then be in a position to sell them.

Good hygiene and ventilation are priorities at the Woodhill Stud stables.

“At the end of the day, you have to sell horses to keep the show on the road but it is very satisfying bringing on these horses and giving them the foundations that they need to be successful.”

Paul acknowledges the help of his wife, Seryna, who is an integral part of the operation and very much involved in the decision making process.

Having Woodhill Stud in the Signpost Programme is very exciting as it enables us to look at things more sustainably for equine farms. Paul himself brings energy, enthusiasm and an openness to change to the Signpost Programme and I very much look forward to working with him.