

# GROWING ORGANICS

Supporting & Increasing Organic Production



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

## Organic Farm Walk



on the farm of  
**John Hamilton,**  
Newtowncunningham,  
Co. Donegal

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**Teagasc Organic Farm Walk**  
*on the farm of*  
**John Hamilton,**  
**Newtowncunningham, Co. Donegal,**  
**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2024**



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# Introduction

John is farming in St Johnston, Co. Donegal with the out farm in Newtowncunnigham Co. Donegal. This farm began its' conversion to organic farming in 2009 and has full organic status since 2011. The land is all owned by John with no land leased. The farm consists of three main enterprises which are a suckler herd, a midseason lambing flock of ewes and also a tillage enterprise. The tillage enterprise is largely used for growing feed for the cattle and sheep on the farm but there is also a small amount of feed sold off farm to local organic farmers.

The Suckler enterprise consists of 20 suckler cows with predominantly Hereford x Simmental breeding. The cows have excellent milk ability and produce excellent quality calves. John has recently switched to using a red Angus sire which continues the ease of finishing animals which the Hereford has provided in the past. All cattle produced are finished on farm and are sold through an organic processor.

The sheep enterprise consists of a flock of 50 ewes with a scanning rate of approximately 1.8 annually. Again all lamb is brought right through to finish, however at the moment john does not have an organic market for his lamb.

The tillage enterprise for 2024 consists of a combination crop (Pea, Barley and Oat Mix), arable silage, Forage rape and a Pea/Bean mix as part of a nationwide trial.

## **Farm Details and Land Use**

The farm is split into two blocks the home farm consisting of 14.82 hectares of predominantly grassland and the out farm consisting of 32.34 hectares. The out farm includes grassland, tillage and red clover silage. Overall the holding is made up of the grassland for grazing of 20.65 hectares, 0.4 hectares of Pea/Bean mix, 5.62 hectares of Combi crop, 14.29 hectares of red clover silage, 1.85 hectares of Multispecies sward, 1.90 hectares of forage rape and 2.45 hectares of Wild Bird Cover.

The grazing area will be carrying 20 cows & 20 calves, 15 finishing cattle/replacements as well as 50 ewes with 85 lambs which gives a whole farm grass stocking rate of 1.24 Lu/ha excluding the tillage area.

**Table 1 – Planned Land Use Details 2024**

<b>Land Use</b>		<b>Use</b>
Combi Crop		Winter Feed
Red Clover Silage		Winter Feed
Rape		Feed/Rush Control
Total		

## **Suckler Enterprise**

**Table 2 – Stock Details 2024**

<b>Stock Type</b>	<b>2024</b>
	<b>15</b>
Calves	<b>17</b>
Bulling Heifers	<b>6</b>
0-1 Yrs Cattle	<b>-</b>
1 - 2 Yrs Cattle	<b>12</b>

## Cow Breeds

### Cows

- Hereford X

### Bull

- Red Angus

## Beef Performance 2023

Table 3 Male Performance

Average Live weight	<b>782kg</b>
Average Carcass weight	<b>439kg</b>
Average Price	<b>€2476</b>
Average Price/Kg	<b>€5.64</b>
Average Age	<b>25 Months</b>

Table 4 Female Performance

Average Live weight	<b>647kg</b>
Average Carcass weight	<b>370kg</b>
Average Price	<b>€2127</b>
Average Price/Kg	<b>€5.75</b>
Average Age	<b>35 Months</b>

## **Grazing Management**

Livestock are grazed on a rotational basis around the farm using a paddock system. John aims to begin grazing from March until late November. Livestock graze pastures of permanent grassland, Multi Species herbal ley and white clover ley. Topping is carried out as necessary to improve grassland performance and to control weeds. A rotation/reseeding programme is also implemented to improve grass quality and also suppress the weed burden on the farm.

## **Winter Feed Management**

Johns winter diet is made up predominantly of Red & White Clover silage a small amount of combi crop (Pea, Barley Oat mix) is used to finish cattle where required.

The combination crop is also used to feed ewes pre lambing. The growing of a mixed pea/bean crop in 2024 aims to grow extra protein for the diet. This is being carried out as part of the Teagasc VALPRO Path project which aims to increase the production of plant proteins.

See VALPRO project details at the following link.  
<https://valpropath.eu/>



# **Grassland Management**

Clover drives organic farming by fixing nitrogen from the atmosphere and is a key way for an organic farmer to get nitrogen into the soil. There are two main types of clover; white clover and red clover.

## **White Clover on the Farm**

Most grazing paddocks have white clovers incorporated into the mix. There is a continual re-seeding program on the farm that is incorporated with growing of crops for feed.

## **Red Clover on the Farm**

There are over 11 ha's of red clover on the farm and this makes up the bulk of the silage requirements. The red clover is cut 3 times/year and offers a highly digestible silage with high protein content. The silage is tested every winter to determine the DMD% and protein content and this is then mixed with the barley/pea/oat grains to make up the required beef finishing diet. The red clover swards demand significant organic nutrients and these are supplied through applications of slurry and FYM. The red clover is lasting 5+ years on this farm with some paddocks lasting for up to 7 years.

## **Herbal/Multi-species Ley**

Herbal leys contain a diverse range of grasses, herbs and clovers. Its aim is to produce a well-balanced forage and not just large volumes of grass. Many of the species used are deep rooting and have the ability to unlock nutrients from deeper in the soil profile. The herbal mixture does not demand high fertiliser inputs and is therefore ideally suited to organic farming. These leys provide increased levels of minerals and vitamins to livestock. Also, when herbal leys are grown for around four years, they have the ability to naturally improve soil structure with their deep roots

**Table 5 – Multi-species mix 2024 – 13 seed mix**

<b>70% Organic Harmony DP Contains</b>	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Kilos</i>
Organic Abergain (Tetraploid Late Perennial Ryegrass)	<b>2.50</b>
Organic Winnetou (Timothy)	<b>2.50</b>
Organic Laura (Meadow Fescue)	<b>2.50</b>
Organic Donata (Cocksfoot)	<b>1.00</b>
Organic Garant (Red Clover)	<b>0.60</b>
Conventional Evora (Smooth Stalked Meadow Grass)	<b>0.80</b>
Conventional Aberswan (White Clover)	<b>2.00</b>
Conventional Aurora (Alsike Clover)	<b>0.40</b>
Conventional Puna II	<b>0.25</b>

(Chicory)	
Conventional Agric Tonic (Herb)	<b>0.25</b>
Conventional Sheeps Parsley (Herb)	<b>0.10</b>
Conventional Burnet (Herb)	<b>0.05</b>
Conventional Yarrow (Herb)	<b>0.05</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.00</b>

# Organic Cereal Enterprise

Currently on the farm there are 6.02 hectares of land devoted to cereals and protein crops some of which are being used for feed purposes and the rest being sold to local organic farmers.

**Table 6 – Combination Crop Details**

<b>Combination Crop</b>
<b>Area:</b> 5.62 ha
<b>Variety:</b> Morgan Mix
<b>Sowing Date:</b> 26/04/2024
<b>Sowing Rate:</b> 250kg/Ha (100kg/Acre)

**Table 7 – Spring Bean/Pea Trial Details**

<b>Spring Beans/Pea Trial (VALPRO Path Project)</b>
<b>Area:</b> 0.4 ha
<b>Trial Varieties:</b> 1. Carrington & Louhi, 2. Eso & Louhi, 3. Carrington & Vire
<b>Sowing Date:</b> 26/04/2024
<b>Sowing Rate:</b> 1. 333kg/ha 2. 295 kg/ha 3. 326 kg/ha

## **Organic Regulation for Seed Usage**

- Organic seed database with details of suppliers and available organic seed [www.organicxseeds.com](http://www.organicxseeds.com)
- Must seek permission to use un-treated non-organic seed from your Organic Certification Body (OCB).
- A derogation must be obtained from the OCB for use of any untreated non organic seed prior to sowing.
- Conventional treated seed is not permitted to be used.

## **Sources of Nutrients Used on the Farm 2023**

- Farm-yard manure applied in autumn on grazing, silage ground and ploughed in for crops
- Slurry – applied throughout the year on silage after each cut and to grazing paddocks where available
- Lime where required

## **Animal Welfare in Organic Farming**

### **Livestock Health**

- A healthy herd in organic farming is achieved by a combination of good management, sound nutrition and good animal husbandry skills.
- Detection of problems needs to be early, and timely veterinary advice is invaluable – when an animal is ill the organic farmer reacts in the same manner as their conventional neighbour and veterinary assistance is required immediately.

### **Conventional Veterinary Treatments Permitted**

- Animals for meat consumption: 1 course antibiotics within 12 months.
- Animals for breeding: 2 courses antibiotics within 12 months.

- Dairy Mastitis: 2 courses antibiotics within 12 months, otherwise the cow is removed from the milking herd.
- If limits exceeded, organic status is taken away from animal.

### **Withdrawal Periods for use of Veterinary Products**

- Double the withdrawal period for all products.
- Ensure all products used are approved by the organic body
- Abbi may have their own withdrawal periods

### **Animal Health on the Farm**

The switch to organics has not lead to any adverse effects with regard to animal health on the farm.

Faecal analyses are taken to assess the level and identify the type of internal parasites if present.

### **Organic Animal Housing Standards**

- Adjustments to meet organic standards may be necessary – depends on farm situation.
- At least 50% of floor area must be bedded.
- Straw, rushes or untreated wood shavings are acceptable bedding materials and these need not be organic.
- All animal housing is subject to inspection and approval by the Organic Certification Body.
- See Table 5 below for space requirements.

All cattle are housed for the winter on straw with slatted feeding areas. The ability to feed stock on a slatted area reduces the soiling of straw bedding and in turn reduces the quantity required throughout the winter months. The sheep are out wintered.

**Table 8: Minimum Housing Area per head and by weight**

<b>Animal</b>	<b>Minimum Indoor Areas (net area available to each animal)</b>	
	<b>Live-weight Minimum (kg)</b>	<b>m<sup>2</sup>/head</b>
<b>Calves; Beef Cattle; Bull Beef; Suckler Cows</b>	Up to 100kg	1.5
	Up to 200kg	2.5
	Up to 350kg	4.0
	Up to 500kg	5.0
<b>Dairy Cows</b>	Up to 600kg Over 600kg	6.0 min. 1m <sup>2</sup> /100kg
<b>Breeding Bulls</b>		10m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Sheep</b>		1.5m <sup>2</sup> per ewe 0.35m <sup>2</sup> per lamb

# Financial Performance

## John Hamilton Farm Profitability

	Teagasc eProfit Monitor John Hamilton Year: 2023	Teagasc National Farm Survey Year: 2022
Land Ha	44.71	31.3
Stocking rate(LU/Ha)	1..02	1.11
Gross output/ha	943	985
Gross Margin/ha	564	514
Net Margin excl direct payments/Ha	92	-150
Net Margin incl direct payments/Ha	1183	300



### Key Observations on Johns financial performance

The Table above compares John Hamilton’s financial performance in 2023 with national average figures from the Teagasc National Farm Survey.

The key messages from the figures are that John is above average for Gross margin per Hectare. This is as a result of a similar output per hectare and lower costs per hectare than the average National Farm Survey farmer.

The organic farming scheme payment as well as the increase in Net margin leaves John with a very healthy profit including the direct payments on the farm.





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## Organic Certification in Ireland

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the competent authority (i.e. - the Department's Organic Unit is based at Johnstown Castle Estate Wexford) for regulating the organic sector and ensuring that the obligations and requirements of Council Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007 as amended and adhered to. The Organic Unit of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have designated Official Certification Bodies whose role is to certify organic producers, farmers and processors through and inspection process of each individual's unit or farm. Further information can be sourced from these organic certification bodies:

IOA (Irish Organic Association)

13 Inish Carraig, Golden Island, Athlone.

Tel: (090) 64 33680 [www.irishorganicasssociation.ie](http://www.irishorganicasssociation.ie)

Email: [info@irishoa.ie](mailto:info@irishoa.ie)

Organic Trust,

Office A1, Town Centre House,

Dublin Rd, Naas, Co. Kildare

[www.organictrust.ie](http://www.organictrust.ie)

Email: [info@organictrust.ie](mailto:info@organictrust.ie)



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## **Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme Organic Capital Investment Scheme (OCIS)**

A standard rate of aid of 60% on investments up to a ceiling of €90,000 for all organic farmers.

### **How to Apply and Closing Date:**

Online applications only through [www.agfood.ie](http://www.agfood.ie) facility.

### **Full details and T&C:**

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/0e509-tams-3/>

### **Queries:**

DAFM Organic Unit, Johnstown Castle: (053) 91 63400

## **Organic Processing Investment Grant Scheme**

Grant aid of up to 60% on facilities for the processing, preparation, grading, packing and storage of organic products with minimum level of investment in excess of €3,000.

### **More Details:**

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/51e8d-organic-processing-investment-grant-scheme/#rate-of-payment>

DAFM Organic Unit, Johnstown Castle: (053) 91 63400

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# GROWING ORGANICS




## Contact Us:

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 [www.teagasc.ie/organics](http://www.teagasc.ie/organics)

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