

## TAMS II SCHEME ENCOURAGING MULTIPLE EFFICIENCIES ON DAIRY FARM

In Ireland, there are over 18,000 Dairy farmers milking 1.5million dairy cows.

In 2019, The Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) had recorded Co. Cork as having the largest number of dairy cows, at 380,772 (25% of the dairy herd population), followed by Tipperary and Limerick at 177,905 and 119,361 cows, respectively. In 2016, Cork recorded 362,448 dairy cows, followed by Tipperary and Limerick, recording 158,933 and 116,160 dairy cows, respectively.

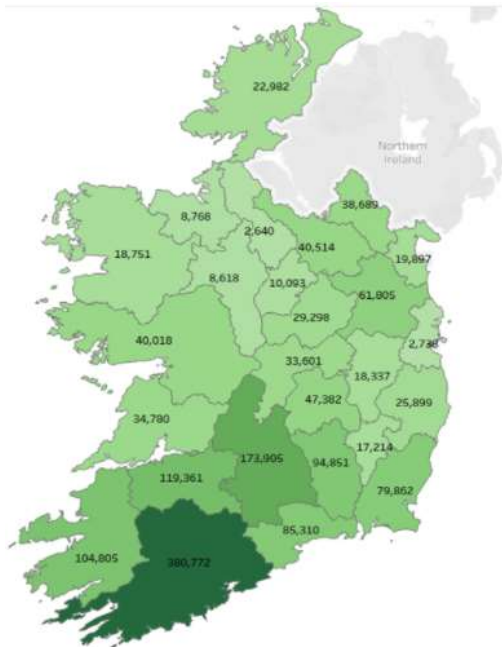


Image Source: ICBF.com

Since the inception of milk quotas in Ireland in 1984, milk output per cow has increased by 48%. The average litres produced per cow in 1984 was 3,500 litres vs. 5,200 litres in 2014. During this time, the average herd size also increased by 350% from 18 cows in 1984 to 64 cows in 2014. Milk quotas were introduced across the European Union market to slow milk production within the EU, which was rising much faster than demand.

In 2015 Milk quotas were removed to address the considerable increase in consumption of dairy products on the world market; quotas prevented EU producers from responding to the growing demand.

Over the last 30 years, the public and private Farm Advisory Service (FAS) have played a vital role in ingraining three core principles among dairy farmers, grassland management, breeding/herd fertility, and cost control. Research and new technologies were disseminated via farmer-friendly decision support tools through knowledge transfer techniques to farmers, helping them become efficient and sustainable.

Since the abolishment of milk quotas, the average herd size increased from 68 cows in 2015 to approx. 80 cows in 2018 (Teagasc National Farm Survey). Advances in breeding techniques and research helped farmers to learn how to select appropriate bulls for breeding and identified thresholds for desired traits to achieve improvements in Milk Solids and improve fertility within the herd. Dairy cows are now producing more milk through better management than their predecessors. Research on grassland systems and management techniques has helped farmers to produce more grass to support higher livestock numbers, thus increasing the level of output per hectare; growing good quality grass also reduces farm feed costs.

With herd size increasing and farmers looking to become more efficient, significant investment has taken place within the sector to cope with dairy herd expansion. Parlours had to be modernised or replaced with new structures to facilitate the larger quantity of milk flow. Time management, in particular, the time spent milking is a critical driver for

investment; large herds of over 100 cows are now common throughout Ireland. Research indicates that total milking time should take no longer than 1.5 hours, maximising the number of cows milked at one time is key to improving time management; this has added benefits as

prolonged waiting times in the collecting yard results in cows becoming distressed and dirty before they enter the parlour. Longer standing times in the collecting yard as the herd size increases can result in higher instances of lameness.



**Image Source: NRN**

**Caption: Young Farmer Matthew Mullen & his Father Declan.**

The NRN met with young farmer Matthew Mullen from Co. Meath. Matthew is a full-time dairy farmer, farming in a registered farm partnership with his Father Declan, Mother Gladys, and Uncle Gerry. Matthew completed his Green Cert in 2015 and joined the registered farm partnership in 2017.

In 2017, the Mullen Partnership put plans in place to build and update the milking facilities on the family farm. Matthew qualified under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (YFCIS) within the TAMS II and was eligible for a 60% grant rate; Declan, Gladys, and Gerry were eligible for a 40% grant rate under the TAMS II scheme due to the registered Farm Partnership.

In 2014, the Mullen family was milking 140 cows; in 2020, the herd had expanded to 315 cows. The Mullen family undertook to build new milking facilities to facilitate the large herd size. The building works were completed in February 2018.

The Mullen family is now enjoying a bespoke new milking facility that has eased the workload on the entire family. A new 26-unit milking parlour with an automated feeding system and electronic drafting facilities have significantly reduced milking times alone to just 3 hours per day, 1.5 hours per milking. Before the upgrading of the farmyard, the Mullens had a 10-unit milking parlour in place; milking times were consuming over 5 hours per day. The new facilities mean that labour on the farm now has an additional 17.5 hours per week to focus on other aspects of the farm.

Overall, cow welfare has improved; the standing time for cows entering the parlour has dramatically reduced, leading to lesser instances of lameness and improvements in milk yield as a result of less stress.





“The TAMS II scheme enabled us to install other efficiency technologies such as a plate cooler, a heat recovery unit, auto-washer, cluster removers, drafting facilities, and even include an office space to centralise all paperwork and records. The funding from TAMS II afforded us the ‘bells and whistles’ within the milking facilities, which lead to further efficiencies for energy, time, and labour savings. Sustainability and efficiency are high profile topics, but to implement measures can be very costly to the farmer; the TAMS II scheme has eased that burden.” said Matthew.

The most significant benefit Matthew has seen on the farm is the reduced milking time; “The herd has grown from 140 cows in 2014 to 315 cows today, the new facilities have allowed us to milk more cows in less time, which means we can now target other areas for increased efficiency, like grassland management. I began measuring and recording grass growths in summer 2018; we simply did not have the time to implement it before then.”

Over the next five years, Matthew is turning his focus to the herd Economic Breeding Index (EBI). Matthew and his father have worked out a breeding programme with their Advisor, which incorporates the use of high EBI bulls for the 2020 breeding season.

The NRN would like to thank Matthew and Declan for taking the time out of their busy spring schedule to talk to us about their farm.

For further information on the TAMS II scheme visit:

[www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/tams/](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/tams/)

Resources:

[www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie)

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

[www.icbf.com](http://www.icbf.com)