

## National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Andrew McMenamín

Andrew McMenamín from Ballybun, Castlefinn, Donegal was recently awarded the 2022 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award as part of the FBD Young Farmer of the Year



Competition. Andrew runs a dairy calf to beef enterprise on the 30-acre family farm which he took over in his own right after completing the Green Cert in Ballyhaise College in 2015. Andrew purchases around 30 calves each year which are mainly dairy cross animals although he has some continental breeds. His aim is to reach finishing target weights at between 18 to 22 months.

“The farms focus centres on the idea that biodiversity can create a circular economy on the farm”. Every action Andrew implemented has a follow-on effect. Andrew is transforming his agricultural practices to significantly reduce biodiversity loss. The FBD Young Farmer of the Year Competition made Andrew examine every aspect of the farm from an economic and environmental point of view to drive efficiency finding the most sustainable way to farm whilst incorporating biodiversity.

Biodiversity is something Andrew is passionate about, and he has completed a dissertation on “Hedgerow Conservation and Management Practices to Improve Diversity”. “My main findings from this study showed that planting native trees is extremely beneficial to protect various habitats and species while conserving the traditional Irish landscape. In addition, the correct management of hedgerows offers huge potential to create ‘biodiversity corridors’ for species and habitats to be connected, protected, and conserved”. Andrew has subsequently implemented relevant actions from his findings on his farm to improve and enhance hedgerows.



When it comes to maximising efficiency Andrew has implemented many soil fertility and grassland management actions with the aim of maximising production and reducing input costs which will lead to a more profitable environmentally friendly farming system. With this in mind Andrew explained how he carries out soil testing every second year and he stated that getting the soil fertility levels correct has had the biggest positive impact on reducing his farm costs whilst also enhancing soil biodiversity via a healthy soil. The results from his soil tests are used for a tailored nutrient

management plan which allows Andrew to make informed decisions on the correct nutrients and quantities required for his soil. "Correcting the soil fertility has allowed me to implement the successful reseeded of multi species swards and incorporating red clover mixes which is maximising grass production". In addition to this he has switched from Nitrogen CAN fertiliser to Protected Urea. These actions have maximised Andrew's soil and grass efficiency and productivity resulting in an environmental and economic win whilst promoting biodiversity.



Andrew completed a beginners bee keeping course in August 2021 and now has his own hive. The flowers on the multispecies and red clover swards are providing a source of food for Andrew's bees whilst also sustaining the swards productivity via nitrogen fixation and reducing reliance on chemical nitrogen application. All species of hedgerows and trees planted on the farm have also been selected with biodiversity in mind as the flowering trees like whitethorn and cherry blossom will also aid the development of the beehive. This is a prime example of the interconnected nature of Andrew's farming system.



Andrew is keen on availing of any Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) schemes available to him to further develop the farms infrastructure or environmental sustainability and has recently availed of a TAMS II grant to construct a new shed. This infrastructure allows for better stock management but also has the added benefit of further enhancing his slurry storage capacity. This has increased Andrew's labour efficiency reducing pressure to spread slurry until conditions are favourable. He is also currently exploring entering Tranche 2 of the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) implementing actions such as planting/coppicing hedgerows, establishing riparian zones, and an orchard to continue to promote and sustain biodiversity levels on his farm.



Andrew's enterprise shows that carbon reduction targets and increased biodiversity can be achieved on more intensive farm systems. "Everybody plays a part in the 25% reduction target outlined in the Climate Action Plan and there should be 'space for nature' on all systems for both environmental and economic benefits".

The NRN would like to congratulate Andrew on his recent award and wish him the best of luck with all aspects of his farming enterprise going forward.