

Practical Challenges and Opportunities of Regenerative Agriculture; REGINA findings on The Irish Farmer Perspective

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SECAD Partnership CLG

- Established in 1995
- Local Development Company located in Midleton, Co. Cork
- Providing a range of rural development, social inclusion & environmental supports to motivate and empower local communities to create a more vibrant, sustainable and inclusive society
- Delivered through variety of funded programmes e.g. LEADER, SICAP, PEIL, Tus, Community Benefit Funds
- Local, Regional, National & European Partnerships





Working with the Farming Community



Sustainable Rural Development strongly rooted in local agriculture sector



LEADER Rural Development Programme & Agri-Diversification



Rural Social Scheme



Building Partnerships & Collaborations

Irish Farming Context

- Agri-food sector is Ireland's oldest and largest indigenous exporting sector. In 2020, the sector accounted for over 6% of GNI and 9% of exports in value terms.
- Majority of farms in Ireland managed through a Family Farm structure (99%+)
- 5 main farming systems are: Cattle (Rearing & Other), Dairy, Sheep, Tillage and Mixed Livestock
- 41% of Irish farms are considered economically 'sustainable', with farm income, or additional off-farm income*
- 31% of Irish farms are 'vulnerable', meaning their farm is not viable and neither farmer nor spouse has an off-farm job*
- Only 1.3% farm holdings are organic in Ireland
- Rural youth out-migration and the ageing farmer profile are key issues facing rural areas. Young farmers make up only 6.9% of the farming population in Ireland**.





RA in Ireland

- Growing sector, but still relatively small
- Self-taught
- Refined through trial-and-error
- Small steps, slow transition – ‘Rome wasn’t built in a day’
- Great sense of community amongst those practicing – a number of very proactive groups and networks
- Increasing policy focus, but limited Government recognition and lack of funding



Irish Case Studies

Diverse Range of Farms interviewed.

Farmers:

- Laura Jane Foley & Daniel Lyons, **Wild Atlantic Hemp**, County Clare [Hemp].
- **Andrew Bergin**, County Kildare [Arable].
- Steve & Claire Collins, **DerryDuff Farm**, County Cork [Berry Farm & Mixed Livestock].
- John McHugh, **Clondarrig Farm**, County Laois [Dairy, Beef & Community Allotments].
- **Paul Moore**, County Cork [Arable]
- **Mervyn & Robert Auchmuty**, County Roscommon [Arable]
- Fergal & Sally, **Moyhill Farm**, County Clare [Market Farm & Mixed Livestock]





Case Study
DerryDuff Farm

DerryDuff Farm

Steve & Claire Collins | Co. Cork
Berry Production & Mixed Livestock



- 54 hectare farm, West Cork.
- Attained organic status in 2010.
- No Chemical Inputs.
- Mountainous, rugged landscape.
- Main Crops: Blueberries & Aronia Berries.
- Main Product: Health food drinks & powders.



DerryDuff Farm

Steve & Claire Collins | Co. Cork
Berry Production & Mixed Livestock

- Clover and herbs mixed into grassland.
- Manual weeding.
- Native trees, Shrubs & Ponds.
- Integrating Cattle & Chickens with the land.
- Tree nursery and agroforestry.




DerryDuff Farm

Steve & Claire Collins | Co. Cork
Berry Production & Mixed Livestock

- Apple Orchard.
- Farming in harmony with the natural landscape.
- Trial & Error, "common sense".
- Improved income, land management, soil & biodiversity.



A photograph of a farm scene featuring a group of chickens and three pigs in a grassy field. The chickens are of various breeds, including black, white, and brown. The pigs are brown and appear to be foraging. The background shows a line of trees and a clear sky. The text 'Case Study Paul Moore' is overlaid in the center of the image.

Case Study
Paul
Moore

Paul Moore

Arable (tillage) Farmer
Co. Cork

- 56 hectare tillage farm.
- Malting Barley, Beans and Oilseed Rape, with a small herd of cattle
- Began experimenting with RA in 2017.
- About one quarter of Paul's land is farmed regeneratively, with the hope to transition more.
- Strip tilling: improved water drainage & soil health.



Paul Moore

Arable (tillage) Farmer *Co. Cork*

- Wildlife Field Margins.
- Beetle Banks amongst tillage fields.
- Promoting helpful insects that attack aphids: Ladybirds and certain beetles.
- Use of Cover crops.
- Reduced workload and input costs. Increased biodiversity.





BASE Ireland

Rob Coleman,
Cork Farmer and BASE member

- BASE Ireland – an Irish Farmer-led group where farmers share their RA experiences, ideas, and lessons of advice to other farmers trying out the alternative farming methods
- 100+ members – allows farmers to educate each other, chat online, and host knowledge sharing workshops
- Rob & his father Billy run a mixed tillage and stock farm in North Cork, with tillage being the main commercial aspect of the farming system



Rob Coleman speaking at Irish National REGINA Workshop, April 2024



Challenges

- Farm viability may be affecting perceived ability to engage in more sustainable and emissions mitigation practices
- Suspicion regarding potential results – risk & lack of information – ‘it has to pay the bills!’
- While some schemes (e.g. organic) exist, there is limited economic motivation due to the lack of RA incentives
- Practices are contextual to their own land, no ‘one size fits all’ approach
- Concern potential RA policy won’t be ‘bottom up’ / farmer-led, so may be too regulated/ restrictive which is counter intuitive
- Not easy to achieve a good premium price due to limited consumer awareness of RA



Irish Consumer Prioritisation Graphs*



- Work to be done with Irish consumers!
- Sustainability overall has a relatively modest influence on Irish shopper's choices right now when compared to global norms
- 3 in 4 saying they would like to buy more sustainable options, but they are often too expensive.

* Bord Bia, Irish Food Board, Global Insights, 2021



Opportunities

- Appetite to learn and *'do the right thing'*
- Peer support, community and knowledge sharing – BASE, National Organic Training Skillnet (NOTS), Farming for Nature
- Sharing inspiring and hopeful messages – great passion & commitment
- Messaging: opportunity to build resilience and farm sustainability over time
- Reducing the risks for farmers in their 'trial-and-error' conversion processes – more practical research and funding
- Attracting young farmers back to rural areas
- Engaging with communities and consumers, valuing the processes, encouraging dialogue and social exchange





RA as an Innovation - Food for Thought

- *'the implementation of an idea, service, process, procedure, structure, system, or product that is new to the prevailing practice'* (Jaskyte, 2018)
- Innovation requires risk tolerance
- Policy must support experimentation, flexibility and learning
- Nurture bottom-up experimentation that empowers farmers to find what works on their farm
- Promote cross-learning and knowledge sharing that is required to support innovation



Conclusions

Regenerative Agriculture in Ireland

- 1 RA in Ireland is being led by a community of self-driven farmers
- 2 Mantra of 'trial and error'
- 3 Peer-to-peer learning is key
- 4 Empowering – RA encourages farmers to feel like they are part of the solution



REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE IN IRELAND

Sharing Good News Stories
Online Webinar & Q+A
Tuesday 11th July
7:00-8:30PM

Register on Eventbrite
or email: ipower@secad.ie

SECAD  **REGINA**   Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Thank you!

And check out the SECAD Website...

Regenerative Agriculture Blogs & other resources

www.secad.ie

