

CITA

RECORD

Summer 2003



Urban Rural Week

Looking to the future

With the continuous and accelerating changes in agriculture, the role of agricultural graduates is being affected by policy changes such as the mid-term review of CAP, EU Enlargement, WTO negotiations and consumer pressures leading to increasing emphasis on environmental, quality and traceability issues. It is crucial that the ASA plays a leading role in ensuring that decisions taken that affect Irish farmers are based on sound professional advice.

The representation of agricultural graduates on policy issues is a priority for the association. Present matters being pursued include a submission completed on REPS and meetings with the Minister and County Council delegates to impress upon them the necessity of having appropriate agricultural expertise working within this field on a wide range of subjects – including nutrient management planning and environmental issues.

The annual conference, which takes place this year in Kilkenny will address some of the issues affecting graduates.

Our linkage and involvement with NIAS, through Agrilink, has now been extended to membership of CEDIA, the European umbrella group for agricultural associations. Sean Gaule and John O'Donovan have been active representatives with this grouping. Recent seminars in Paris pointed to involvement of the national associations in job services and communications to their members. ASA is actively pursuing opportunities for providing a comprehensive service in Ireland.

We must continue to examine how best to develop as an association at all times and how best to represent members, protect their interests and fulfil members' needs. To this end, we are undertaking an extensive survey through Pat Bogue, where 200 members and 200 non-members will receive a questionnaire or a telephone survey on various aspects of the organisation. This is the start of a process to review and assess the strategy and blueprint for the association for the next decade. I would urge you to give of your time and return the questionnaires promptly, if you are a recipient, to allow us to elicit the best possible information. Your encouragement to non-members to participate in the survey would be appreciated also – the aim is to build a stronger, better representative organisation for the future.

You will also note that this edition of the ASA Record is taking a new format. We have committed to a two-year agreement with the *Irish Farmers Monthly* for the delivery of two editions annually of the ASA Record. These editions will be part of the magazine and will extend the contact of the ASA Record. We will continue to issue a further edition annually in the format we have used for the last number of years. I hope you enjoy this edition.



Pat Cahill
President ASA

The History of Irish Farming



A new book that will be of interest to all our readers is currently in press. This is a history of Irish farming, and is included as one of the flagship projects for the centenary of the Faculty of Agriculture at UCD. The full title of the book is "Farming in Ireland: History, Heritage and Environment", and its author is Dr John Feehan of the Department of Environmental Resource

Management in the Faculty, who is known to many readers for his teaching work in the field of agri-environmental management. It looks like being a mighty big book, around 600 pages hardback, profusely illustrated. The price appears steep enough at €90, but it is not expensive for a book of its size - especially for one which seems set to become the standard work in its field and will be indispensable for anybody interested in the history of Irish farming, or the development and management of the rural environment. The good news is that a special pre-publication offer is being made available to ASA members, under which you can get the book for €50, plus postage. If you would like a copy of the pre-publication brochure, you can get it from UCD's Agriculture Faculty Office, or by sending a text message to 087 677 1261.



FRONT COVER:

Amanda Power, St Brigid's National School, Haddington Road, Dublin feeding the pet lamb at Airfield Trust Farm in Dublin at the opening event of Urban Rural Week, organised by the Agricultural Science Association (ASA) in conjunction with the INTO. Also included are, from left: Jeanne Prendergast, Airfield Trust Farm; Pat Cahill, President ASA; Dermot Lacey, Lord Mayor of Dublin and Sean Rowley, President INTO.

ASA submission to Minister on REPS



The council of the ASA recently responded to a call by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Joe Walsh for submissions with on a new rural Environmental Protection Scheme. The focus of the submission was to ensure that the rural environment continues to benefit from the involvement of professional agriculturalists in ensuring farmers are able adapt the most environmentally friendly production techniques at the same time as optimising farming profits.

New Chairman for Agri link

The outgoing chairman of Agrilink, Oliver Burke handed over the chair to Andrew Stewart (NIAS) at a meeting in Letterkenny on March 19. Andrew will serve for a two-year period and the group will continue to seek areas of co-operation between the ASA and NIAS to further the interests of professional agriculturalists who are members of the respective organisations.

Urban Rural Week



Pascal Murphy (left) supervisor with Newbridge Traditional Farm at Donabate and Tom Haesy Education Officer with Teagasc in Dublin showing exotic kid goats to: (from left) Joanne Byrne, Sean O'Donnell, Amy Brannigan and Dean Carberry, pupils of St Joseph's National School, Bonnybrook. The school visit was part of Urban Rural Week organised by the Agricultural Science Association and the INTO to enable city children to experience farming at first hand.



SEAN CAMPBELL, co-ordinator, reports on another successful year for this ASA event.

The 2003 Urban Rural Week programme was held during the last week in May 2003. It is 20 years since the programme was started and it is as successful as ever. Urban Rural Week has given primary school children who would have little or no contact with farms or

farming the chance to visit a working family farm to see first hand how Irish food is produced. It has grown from strength to strength over the years and provides an excellent opportunity to break down barriers and misconceptions about Irish farming and food production.

At the launch, ASA president Pat Cahill remarked: "This event provides an excellent opportunity for these children who are tomorrow's consumers to adopt a positive attitude to Irish food production."

The event was officially launched by Minister Joe Walsh in

Dublin and the opening event was attended by the INTO President Sean Rowley; Mayor of Dublin, Dermot Lacey; and President of the ASA, Pat Cahill.

Anniversary awards

The main feature of the 2003 Urban Rural Week 20th Anniversary celebrations will be the presentation of a number of awards for participating farmers and country coordinators who have made significant contributions to this programme over these years. The following awards will be presented

at this conference :

1. Longest serving host farmer;
2. Longest serving co-ordinator;
3. Exceptional Urban Rural Week initiatives; and,
4. ASA Urban Rural Week co-ordinator of the year .

These awards will be judged by one ASA ex-president and two previous national co-ordinators for Urban Rural Week .The objective of these awards is to highlight the significant contributions made by both farmers and co-ordinators every year to this important event on the ASA calendar.

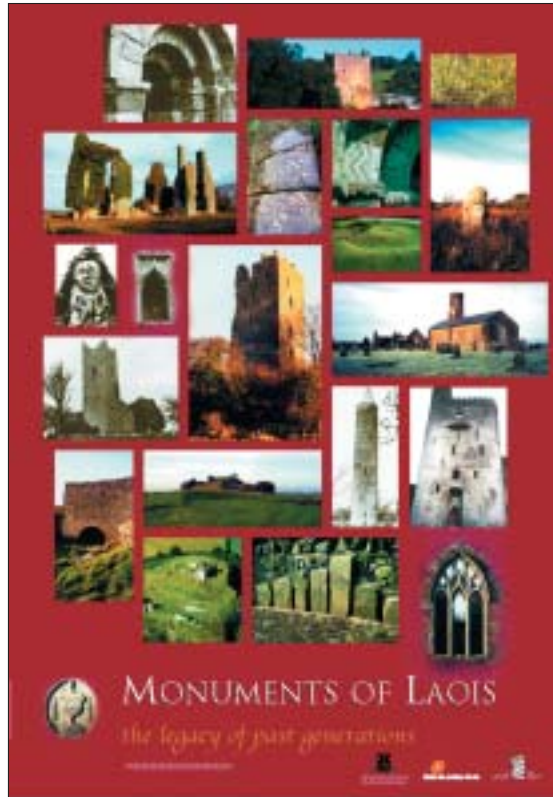
The heritage agenda

Dearbhala Ledwidge, is the Heritage Officer in Laois County Council. Prior to this she was an Environmental Consultant in Dublin, a Project Officer with Scottish Natural Heritage in Inverness, a self-employed Landscape Consultant in England and a Natural Resource Manager with the United States National Park Service. Dearbhala holds a B.Ag.Sc (Landscape Horticulture) from UCD and a Masters in Rural and Regional Resources Planning from the University of Aberdeen. ASA Record spoke to Dearbhala about her work.

How long have you been working as Heritage Officer?
I started work as the Heritage Officer for Laois County Council in January of this year. Prior to this the previous Heritage Officer covered both Laois and Offaly.

Is the Heritage Officer post a new one?

The employment of heritage officers by local authorities became national policy when the Government adopted the National Heritage Plan in April 2002. To date there are approximately 20 heritage officers throughout the country. The post is



a partnership arrangement between the local authority and the Heritage Council. Laois County Council is my employer and the Heritage Council provides financial, technical and professional assistance.

What exactly does a Heritage Officer do?

The remit of a heritage officer is very broad! Heritage, in the context of my work and as defined by the Heritage Act, 1995, includes architecture; flora; fauna; wildlife; landscapes; geology; heritage; gardens and parks and inland waterways. Seascapes and wrecks

are also included on a national level, but obviously not in Laois. In Laois, we have also included folklore as part of the heritage remit.

A Local Heritage Plan was prepared by the previous Heritage Officer and local Heritage Forum. It identifies the specific needs and priorities for heritage within the county and agrees a five-year work plan through broad public consultation. This plan informs the range of projects undertaken from year to year by the Heritage Officer.

My role is to develop policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and



Dearbhala Ledwidge

enhancement of Laois's heritage - working in conjunction with a local Heritage Forum. A key part of my role is to forward the heritage agenda within the local authority and the county as a whole. This involves the promotion of interest, education, knowledge and pride in the heritage of County Laois.

What types of projects have you worked on to date?

Projects which I have been involved in are wide ranging and include wildlife enhancement in tidy towns, production of a 'Monuments of Laois' poster, an exhibition on the ecology of owls, talks on monuments in Laois and the production of village design statements.

What next for you?

I will be moving shortly to my home county, Kilkenny, to become the Heritage Officer there with Kilkenny County Council. I am delighted to be moving home to work in Kilkenny but will be sad also to leave Laois. My short time here in the midlands has been a great experience.

One of the new buzz phrases in modern agriculture and environmental planning, what is nutrient management planning and what has it to offer? *ASA Record* spoke to James Fitzgerald on the issue.

Nutrient management planning

Nutrient management planning, began to develop widely as a concept in the early 1990's. Up until then it had been primarily debated as a research tool in order to establish actual crop requirements. The focus had been largely on improving soil fertility, achieving a point of economic efficiency and maximising yields in relation to crop production. However, in the early 1990's it was realised that a more holistic approach to nutrient application, taking into account sustainability of modern agricultural practices and the environment, was required.

To the uninitiated, a nutrient management plan is basically a theoretical balancing equation. It aims to balance the input and output for a crop, in a way that will be long term environmentally sustainable. In theory this means that for any given crop there may be an infinite number of appropriate application rates depending on the site, soil type, vulnerability, place in the rotation, the likelihood of a given soil type to lose its nutrients, etc.

In reality, an NMP (nutrient management plan) can be either simple or complex to suit individual requirements. The simplest forms



are those found in the Department of Agriculture REPS plans, which simply take account of nitrogen and phosphorous application in balance with the stocking rates and basic soil tests for the farm.

The more complex are those being used to determine maximum application rates of heavy metals found in organic sludges. In such situations, great care must be taken to ensure that excessive applications do not endanger or damage the agricultural environment. Here we are also concerned with limiting factors for the soil involved, which might require that no application may be made for various reasons, e.g: lime, phosphorous, molybdenum, toxicity situations, etc.

An integrated element

In a modern crop production situation, nutrient management is

just a single part of the overall, increasingly functional, integration of several elements of environmental concern. An example of this is the introduction of buffer zones for rivers and lakes and assessing how new housing will affect the nutrient balance for the areas involved. Yield expectations will also have to be tailored to reflect the environmental concerns involved in the future. The relatively new concept of hydrogeological vulnerability will preclude certain agricultural activities on the grounds of water protection. The introduction of nitrogen vulnerable zones (NVZs) is an example of this. These factors will have far reaching implications not just for the complexity of the nutrient management plans, but ultimately may become a factor in determining the production/output and the value of lands.

Agronomist's vital role

Modern technology is also at play here with the use of GIS mapping systems in the development of nutrient management plans which will give accuracy in area planning of down to a metre or less. These systems are being tested in conjunction with yield mapping sensors from combines in effort to match offtakes or yield with the inputs to be applied.

In Ireland the application rates recommended for nutrient management planning are based on the Teagasc Handbook 2001. This document provides base line application rates for each crop in various situations. The role of the agronomist is vital at this juncture to interpret the suitability of the application rate for the particular situation. This is a particular area of friction with environmentalists and engineers attempting to second guess application rates without a background or in depth knowledge of agriculture.

One of the major areas of future concern is that of predicting the availability of nutrients from homogenous biosolids and treated sludges, which are being recycled within agriculture. To date no absolute scales or prediction models have been developed for inclusion of such material in organic nutrient management.

Another area would be that of profiling soil characteristics and predicting losses, returns, lockups and soil storage of nutrients, traits which are specific to each field in the country. It may take years to assemble this information. However this data may ultimately determine both the output and economic value of land. The bottom line is that we have a greater knowledge than ever before in the area, but there still remains a lot to do.

UCD Careers Day



ABOVE: At the UCD event were, from left: Pat Cahill, ASA President; Eoin Doyle, AIB Bank, sponsors of the event; Stuart Kirwan, Chairman of UCD Careers Committee and Joe Daly, Secretary ASA.



ABOVE LEFT: ASA Council Members Terence Morrissey (left) and James Fitzgerald interviewing Louisa Hales from Limerick.

LEFT: ASA Council Members John O'Donovan and Edel O'Reilly interviewing Emer Kirwan from Carlow.

Careers Day has now become an annual event at the Faculty of Agriculture in UCD. Hosted and organised by a dedicated Careers Committee, the purpose of the occasion is to provide practical assistance, advice, experience and opportunities to all those in their final qualifying year of the degree programmes.

With the assistance of the Faculty and ASA, the careers event now extends to a two-day event. In day one, final year students now have the opportunity to avail of mock interviews for a job of their choice. This year over 110 final year students availed of such an opportunity and were interviewed by ten panels of technical experts drawn from across the Irish agricultural industry and selected by ASA. Two weeks prior to the students taking their interviews, they were addressed by Terence Morrissey and John O'Donovan, both of ASA.

This provided the students with an opportunity to seek up to date

information on the forthcoming job prospects they face this year, the possibilities with regard to specific job opportunities as well as how to prepare for your mock and real interviews.

At this advisory session provided by ASA, students had an opportunity to apply for their mock interviews for a specific job vacancy of their choice. Financial prizes for the best ten participants were awarded (sincere thanks to AIB which has generously sponsored the prizes for a number of years).

Day two, sees the actual Careers Day event, where the careers committee launch their booklet illustrating names and details of each

final year student graduating this year. This booklet is distributed annually to all potential employers and is also available from the faculty office.

Over thirty companies this year availed of stands at careers day. These varied from public to private enterprise and from state advisory to the Government Department. A number of these companies had job vacancies on offer, and the day proved very successful in providing vital contact between potential employers and our future Irish agricultural entrepreneurs and employees.

Free membership

ASA offered two years free membership to all new graduates who signed up on the day. The proceedings were drawn to a close with an evening seminar hosted in the agriculture facility and this year, final students were addressed by Prof. Seamus Sheehy, Minister Tom Parlon and John Grogan of ASA on careers in both Irish and global agriculture.

Pat O'Meara from AIB Bank was also in attendance to present the best interview winners with their cheques. ASA was delighted to be associated with a very successful careers event in UCD and members look forward to a continued association with the Careers Committee.

Poland in the EU

Continuing our series on the EU accession countries, we look in this issue at Poland.

Poland, a country of 38 million people and about six times the size of Ireland, is located at the heart of Europe. The country will be forever associated with the uprisings that led to the downfall of the Soviet-dominated communist system. The name of Lech Walensa - who led these uprisings - is still instantly recognised all over the world.

Less than 15 years after dismantling the communist system, Poland voted, overwhelmingly, "yes" to EU accession in a referendum on June 6/7. The fact that Poland could successfully transform itself in such a short period from an outdated and inefficient industrial and agriculture-based economy to a modern economy is a measure of the determination of the Polish people to leave the past behind and look to the future with confidence.

The climate in Poland is continental. The coldest period occurs in January with temperatures as low as minus 20 being common in the east of the country. The daytime temperatures in June/July can be as high as 35 degrees with the average being about 25 degrees.

Rapid reform

After the collapse of communism, Poland introduced rapid economic reforms. This led to an initial contraction in the economy as

inefficient and polluting industries were closed down. But it also led to a period of high growth rate in the nineties - the rate of growth in this period was second only to Ireland.

Rural areas and the agricultural sector are an important feature of Polish society and economy. The efforts of the communists to nationalise agriculture was successfully resisted by the farmers - so it is only in the west of Poland, in the former German lands, that large State farms were found. The farming structure remained stable during the communist period so that today there remains in Poland almost 2.5 million farmers and they constitute more than 25 per cent of the total workforce. However over 80 per cent of the farms are small-holdings with an average size of about 2.5 hectares. Over 40 per cent of these farms are subsistence type farms with little or no production placed on the market.

It is the importance of the agricultural sector that led to many difficulties during the Polish negotiations for EU accession. The

difficulties arose because of the huge reduction in production that occurred with the market reforms - e.g. milk production declined from about 15 million tonnes to about nine million tonnes. The initial efforts by the Polish government to have quota in line with the traditional production levels led to some problems. Another issue was a fear that foreign investors would buy up the relatively cheap and good quality land in Poland. This led to Poland getting a temporary derogation to prevent foreign investors buying land.

Traditional systems

The systems of farming are traditional - cereals are produced in 90 per cent of all farms, potatoes in 80 per cent, vegetables in 50 per cent, 64 per cent of all farms have cattle and more than half have pigs.

Another feature is the traditional farming methods - low use of agrochemicals and fertilisers result in lower yields and products of variable physical appearance. The main exports from the sector are

processed meat products, vegetables and fruit. Poland is one of the worlds leading exporters of apples, raspberries, strawberries, cherries and blackcurrants.

One of the fears of farmers in the existing EU - that they will suffer from an influx of low priced low quality products from Poland - is unlikely to arise. The market, except for fruit, is in balance. Additionally, while investments at farm level have brought up standards the difficulty remains of a lack of experience in marketing processed products.

Famous hospitality

Polish hospitality is famous. A visit to a Polish family will be inevitably accompanied by an extravagant meal featuring several dishes and copious amounts of locally produced vodka of excellent quality.

Access to Poland from Ireland at present is a little difficult as there is no direct flight. However, the south of the country is easily accessible by train from Prague. Here tourists can avail of good quality low priced accommodation, food and drink.



There are still almost 2.5 million farmers in Poland and 64 per cent of all farms have cattle and more than half have pigs.



Summer 2003

ASA Captain's Prize 2003 ASA National Conference for Kilkenny

MAKE A DATE IN YOUR DIARY TODAY!

The ASA Captain's Prize was held in Tullamore Golf Club on Thursday, June 19, and 45 people turned out to battle for Michael McHugh's prize. This event is synonymous with Michael Hassett and he was there to meet all his old friends. ASA President, Pat Cahill, thanked Michael for single-handedly having run ASA golf for 45 or so years.

The prizewinners were:

- 1st. John Whiriskey (15) with 39 points;
- 2nd. John Dervan (13) with 36 points;
- 3rd. Tom Cleary (16) with 34 points;
- 4th. Tony Dempsey (15) again with 34 points.

Following the presentation of prizes the AGM was held and Paddy

Horgan, ACC, was elected captain for 2004. The following committee was also elected: Michael Hassett, Tom Collins, Tony Dempsey, John O'Rourke and Bill O'Donovan.

The next outing is the Inter Services Golf Outing in Tullamore Golf Club, on the traditional first Thursday in September, followed by the President's Prize in Kilkenny Golf Club on Thursday September 18. A committee of Denis Carey, Michael Coady, Ger Power and Tom Crowe will be organising the President's Prize.



The winner of the event, John Whiriskey.



The ASA National Conference has gained a significant reputation as a highlight of the Irish agribusiness calendar. This year promises to be no exception, so book the date in your diary now.

The conference itself, sponsored by Glanbia plc, takes place on Friday 19th September and will have the general theme of 'Pathways To A Sustainable Future In Agriculture'.

It takes place at a critical juncture, with speakers directly from the WTO talks in Cancun which take place the previous week; and with time over the summer to assess the implications of changes to CAP. The conference will also examine the scale and structure required at farmer and processor level to deliver global competitiveness.

Delegates have the option of extending their booking to include

the very popular ASA Golf outing and attend the pre-conference banquet on Thursday 18th September.

The conference will take place in the magnificent environs of Kilkenny City - the medieval capital of Ireland and home to the spectacular 12th Century Kilkenny Castle, attractions ranging from Rothe House to Dunmore Caves, a range of wonderful restaurants, shopping and leisure facilities. The conference and its supporting programme for spouses will have something for everyone.

Booking forms will be available from the ASA shortly (email msasa@gofree.indigo.ie) with conference details and booking information available at the ASA web site as soon as it is available: www.asa.ie.

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MERIAL Animal Health

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Merial is one of the world's leading animal healthcare companies

The company's website, www.merial.com has extensive information of interest to agricultural professionals

Did you graduate in 1963?

The ASA is currently compiling a list of ag graduates from the class of 1963 - if that includes you then please forward your up-to-date contact details to Hugh Mahon (h.mahon@carlow.teagasc.ie).