



Joe & Evelyn Deverell along with their family hosted the Smart Farming Farm Talk, with speakers including Joe Healy, IFA President and Charlie Flanagan T.D. Minister for Justice and Equality.

On the last day of summer 2018, over 200 farmers and their families joined Smart Farming participants Joe and Evelyn Deverell just outside the village of Geashill in Co. Offaly to learn, to talk and to listen.

To learn about how GrassVESS can help determine good soil structure. To talk with hybrid and electric car sales people about how these cars can help reduce our climate impact. To listen to current fodder advice, sustainability messages and the future direction of CAP policy.

Here we have captured some of the key messages from the day. Enjoy.

Smart Farming focused on efficiency and environment

Charlie Flanagan T.D. Minister for Justice and Equality was guest speaker at the Farm Talk. In a wide-ranging talk, he encouraged farmers to apply for the SEAI energy efficiency grants to reduce electricity costs. He also recognised the important role that Smart Farming plays in helping to tackle climate change, particularly by using resources efficiently.



New ideas and building on our sustainability record

IFA President Joe Healy encouraged farmers to think about sustainability changes that they might make on their own farms.

He referred to the 200,000 carbon assessments completed as part of Bord Bia's Origin Green programme, and that despite average farm incomes being just over €31,000, farmers continue to invest to safeguard the environmental integrity of their farm businesses. The key climate, air, water and biodiversity challenges that lie ahead were outlined. The importance of Government support for farm incomes and the future sustainable growth of the sector was also highlighted.



Soil – a vital non-renewable resource that delivers multiple functions

Teagasc's David Wall used the new visual soil assessment tools GrassV ESS to highlight the importance of soil, as a vital non-renewable resource that delivers multiple functions simultaneously.

Using the GrassV ESS tool farmers can easily score the structural quality of their soils and identify problems, such as compaction, which can lead to poor crop rooting, reduced yields, drainage problems and increased nutrient losses and emissions. The soils on Joe Deverell's farm were extremely dry following the hot summer, however, David showed that the deep cracking caused by the dry soil conditions has helped to improve the soil structural quality in the deeper soil layers.



Calibrating fertiliser spreaders to improve yields and reduce risk of run-off

Francis Quigley from Teagasc Kildalton demonstrated the correct calibration procedure for fertiliser spreaders in order to maximise crop growth and reduce environmental risks.

He explained the importance of the flow rate of fertiliser and examining things like application rate, forward speed of the tractor and working width. The tray test demonstration proved popular in understanding how to achieve an even distribution when spreading fertiliser. Fertiliser quality characteristics and their impact on spreading, as well as fertiliser technology developments were discussed.



Smart Farming Programme Leader Thomas Cooney and Teagasc's Francis Quigley discuss the importance of fertiliser spreader calibration at the Farm Talk

Digital agriculture – fad or the future?

Ethan Cleary from IFA led a forward-looking talk about the role of digital technology in agriculture.

He believes it will play an increasingly important role in helping farmers get more out of production systems through leveraging insights gained from the increase in on-farm data that is generated. In response to questions he pointed out that data on its own isn't much good, arguing that we need to be able to understand and act on that data, by applying digital technologies. He said that knowledge exchange approaches like the Smart Farming programme can provide farmers with insights that we currently don't get, and digital data can be dovetailed with the programme to make a real difference to the bottom line for farmers.



Fodder, Sustainability and CAP – a lively debate

IFA Director General Damian McDonald chaired an engaging debate, which looked at winter fodder planning, participation in Bord Bia's Origin Green programme and IFA's priorities in the current CAP talks.

Glanbia's Martin Ryan emphasised the importance of fodder budgeting, with the first step being to calculate the winter fodder requirements. Martin also emphasised the importance of grass management over the next couple of months and water availability, particularly where a substantial part of the diet is dry feed.

Mick Houlihan from Bord Bia outlined the value of Bord Bia's QA schemes and Smart Farming in helping to improve farm efficiencies, which support the country's sustainability credentials. The development of feedback reports for farmers who participate in Bord Bia QA schemes was welcomed, as a means of increasing awareness and efficiencies on farm.

IFA's Kevin Kinsella talked through the current CAP discussion. He outlined the New Green Architecture proposed in CAP post 2020 and highlighted IFA's campaign focused on securing an adequate EU Budget to support a strong CAP, financing Pillar 1 (direct payments) and Pillar 2 (Rural development – Farm Scheme). He outlined the Association's opposition to the proposed cuts to the CAP (€98m pa for Ireland) and highlighted the need for this deficit to be made good.



Martin Ryan, Glanbia, Mick Houlihan, Bord Bia, and Kevin Kinsella IFA participate in a panel discussion chaired by Damian McDonald IFA Director General.

Agri-environment matters in the farm yard

Chat, debate and the sharing of new ideas continued into the evening back in the farm-yard. Teagasc highlighted the collaborative approach they are taking to improving water quality through the ASSAP programme and the focus on better nutrient management in the Pasture Base initiative. The National Biodiversity Data Centre highlighted the key actions that farmers can take to help pollinators, while the EPA shared the local water quality data available to us on the catchments.ie website. The SEAI informed us about the range of supports available to reduce energy bills on the farm and in the farm house, while Smart Farming was busy seeking farmers to take part in the 2019 programme. Finally IFA's Crime Prevention Team highlighted practical tips to keep the farm safe.



EPA's Paddy Morris shares a sandwich and chats about water quality data in the local community on the catchments.ie website.



ASSAP's Noel Meehan highlights the collaborative approach to improving water quality, while Pasture Base's Micheál O'Leary discusses good nutrient management planning.



Charlie Flanagan T.D., Minister for Justice and Equality discusses sustainable energy supports with Sara Norris and Helen Williams from the SEAI



Dr. Úna Fitzpatrick from the National Biodiversity Data Centre discusses the key bee-friendly farming practices that farmers can do with Smart Farming participant Eanna Tiernan from Roscommon.



Gillian and Neil O'Sullivan talk all things Smart Farming with Peter Linden.

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