

Welcome to March-April Farming For Nature Newsletter

Spring is definitely in the air these past few weeks, not least in the mixed bag of weather which has veered from three-storms-in-a-week to calm, sublimely beautiful, blue-sky days. Farmers are busy lambing sheep, preparing the ground for crops and calving cows in anticipation of the strong surge in growth that typifies late Spring and early summer. Troubles abound of course – from pandemics to wars to soaring inflation - but there is comfort to be found in nature as it continues its seasonal cycle and farmers continue to work with it. Similarly, our annual cycle of work continues here at Farming for Nature as we sift through another year’s worth of inspiring nominations, while continuing to harvest and share the knowledge of our incumbent ambassadors. There are so many ways to learn – from online events to hands-on workshops and walks. We were particularly delighted to participate in Austria’s first ever Farming for Nature Ambassador Awards ceremony in early March and congratulate the five worthy winners – hopefully the beginnings of a European network of farmers who will help us all negotiate our way to a brighter future for European biodiversity and agriculture. We hope you enjoy this newsletter and please spread the word about FFN among your family and friends.

[What is Farming For Nature? Listen to our short podcast here](#)

Farming For Nature Ambassador Awards in full flight

Now in its fifth year, Farming For Nature has grown to an active network of over 65 wonderful, eloquent Ambassadors scattered across Ireland, who are inspiring many other farmers to take simple measures to enhance nature on their land. This

January we received 62 new nominations regarding other farmers across Ireland who are going that extra mile for nature. From 2 acres to over a thousand, from beef to vineyards, poultry to pigs, sheep to horticulture and lots in between - **if you want a snapshot of this amazing array of nominees for 2022 please click below.**

Each one of these farmers is worthy of acknowledgement and celebration and we thank them for their work and for the inspiration they provide. Thanks also to our (200-strong) nominator network for bringing these farmers to our attention.

So, what's next? Now that we have the nominations in, we are getting ready to engage with these farmers through an in-depth interview and selection process, including judge's visits, so that by late summer, a shortlist of 2022 Ambassadors will be compiled. Then it's on to our annual Ambassador awards, the culmination of our year's work, kindly sponsored by Bord Bia.

[Meet the 2022 nominees here](#)

Meet some of our new Ambassadors up close

Each newsletter we profile some Ambassadors from the 2021 selection process. This March/April we have three farms representing various farm systems and land types. Welcome please; Eoghan Daltun, Michael McManus, and Madeline McKeever & Holly Cairns.

Eoghan Daltun (Co. Cork)

Eoghan Daltun runs a high nature value farm and rewilding project on the Beara peninsula of Co. Cork. "The farm is all about productivity of biodiversity and nature. That is the primary aim" claims Eoghan. The main block of private land is 21.5 acres, the majority of which is highly species-rich native Atlantic temperate rainforest. "The native woodland is incredibly species rich, this part of Ireland is

recognized by biologists as a 'biodiversity hotspot' in terms of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts)". The woodland consists of old sessile oaks and range of other wild native tree species. The understory is equally species-rich and diverse, consisting of a vast array of wildflowers, ferns, mosses, lichen and fungi. The farm is home to an array of wildlife, including some rare species like the Lesser Horseshoe Bat, the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly and the Kerry Slug. The next block of land is a mix of native woodland and species-rich grassland. The final block of land is commonage. Previously a sheep farmer, Eoghan has recently replaced his flock of sheep with a small herd of Dexter cattle. He believes the cattle, as non-selective grazers, are better suited to his farming practice and to the regeneration of the land. The plan is to graze the cattle on the commonage during the summer months and then bring them back to the lower lands during the winter – emulating the very old practice of 'booleying' which involves moving animals to the uplands during the summer season. **More information on Eoghan's farm below, including a short film.**

[Eoghan's Farm](#)

Michael McManus (Co. Leitrim)

Michael McManus hails from Co. Leitrim where he farms a suckler herd on over 180 acres. The organic farm is comprised of 3 distinct areas. The first is described as 'rocky outcrop' land, the second is 'sandy loam' land and the third he describes as a 'shale-type' land. All three of these distinct areas contain their own rich variety of grasses and herbs. Michael operates a rotational grazing system, whereby the animals are moved from one area to the next throughout the year. They are moved in accordance with the stage of growth they are at or whether they have calves on them at the time – "I firmly believe that having different plant types for cattle to graze on provides them with a wide range of minerals and nutrients. I think cattle have natural curiosity that needs to be satisfied – they enjoy grazing different areas that have different types of vegetation." The natural meadows have not been reseeded and provide great biodiversity on the farm. "The grazing of this type of land with cattle helps promote the natural vegetation here. The only management

of the land is the cattle grazing, then letting the grasses and flowers grow (buttercup, meadowsweet and so on) then cutting the meadow for hay/silage later in the summer.” The cattle overwinter outdoors where they are supplemented with some meal and hay/silage. Michael is interested in agroforestry, permaculture and preserving traditional methods of farming. He values nature, heritage and biodiversity on his farm. “Our ethos around having an ecotourism business is for the benefit and sustainability of our family farm without spoiling nature’s natural resources that already prevail here on the farm. We recognise our ancient ecosystem is not just our farming history but is our farming future.” **More information on Michael’s farm below including a short film. Or learn directly from Michael himself by registering for his online Ask the Farmer Q&A below.**

[Michael's Farm](#)

Madeline McKeever & Holly Cairns (Co. Cork)

Madeline McKeever runs an organic 30-acre mixed farm in west Cork along with her daughter Holly Cairns. There are 15 acres of broadleaf forestry on the land, containing oak, alder, ash and nut trees. There are 10 acres of permanent mixed pasture and the remaining land is used for seed production and nature corridors. Madeline keeps a small herd of cattle, producing beef for the home and for a few local customers. The cattle are grazed using Voisin’s rational grazing system, meaning the grass is rested for approximately 30 days before being grazed again. A small amount of silage is cut off the land to provide winter feeding for the animals and the animal manure is used to fertilize the land. External inputs on the farm are extremely low. Founder of Brown Envelope Seeds, Madeline is one of only two farms in the country producing vegetable seeds. They produce over 100 varieties of organically certified, open pollinated seed which is sold to Irish growers and gardeners around the country. A wildlife enthusiast all her life, Madeline enjoys seeing an array of birds coming and going to farm, such as choughs, thrushes, chiffchaffs, redwings, fieldfares and lots of other songbirds. The family have planted a diverse range of trees, hedges and fruit

bushes on the farm which attract insects like solitary bees, wild honeybees, bumble bees, hoverflies and wasps, all of whom play a crucial role in pollinating the seed crops. Madeleine's love of nature is reflected in the low impact, regenerative farming system she runs. More information on Madeline and Holly's farm here. **Or learn directly from Madeline herself by registering for her online Ask the Farmer Q&A below.**

[Madeline and Holly's Farm](#)

Ask the Farmer Q&A continues

The 'Ask the Farmer' series continues to run over these next few months, during which a number of our amazing Ambassadors will be on-line to tell us a little more about their farm and farming system and to answer your questions about farming for nature. These 'live' evening sessions will take place every other Tuesday and include a short interview with the featured farmer and then an open Q&A session where you can 'ask the farmer' about whatever you would like to know, with a focus on practical management advice. It is a great opportunity to learn from our Ambassadors who work with nature every day on their farms, and also to share your own ideas and experience of 'Farming for Nature'.

We have the following farmers lined up for these sessions. Please register using the button below.

- 8th March 2022 8pm **Fruit growing and diversification in a farm business** with Kilkenny farmer Rod Calder-Potts.
- 22nd March 2022 8pm **Building an organic beef and cereal business alongside nature** with Westmeath farmer Pat Lalor.
- 5th April 2022 8pm **Growing open pollinated seeds, beef and trees on a mixed organic farm** with Cork farmer Madeline McKeever.

- 19th April 2022 8pm **Growing an ecotourism business within a farm** with Leitrim farmer Michael McManus.

[Ask the Farmer Q&A Registration](#)

Nature's Calendar this Spring

Boxing March hares, expanding bubbles of frogs' spawn, the elegant cuckoo flower and the call of its namesake bird, blooming hedgerows full of blackthorn and even an emerging roosting bat or two on warmer evenings, are just some of the things you can expect to see and hear over the coming months. For more information on what wildlife to look out for and what practical actions you can take on your farm, see our March & April nature calendars below.

[Nature's Calendar - MARCH](#)

[Nature's Calendar - APRIL](#)

Groundtips - advice from farmers for farmers

This section on our website which provides practical advice and tips from farmers in their own words on how they have enhanced nature on their land. Everything from ponds to bats, owls to agroforestry, green manures to holistic grazing, hill grazing to fens and much more. Click below to read their top tips on these areas.

[Groundtips from farmers](#)

Groundtips Podcasts

We continue to add new podcasts to our series every few weeks. These short audios are a great way to listen to what our farmers are up to on their land and how they are carrying out certain actions to improve nature on their farm. They can be enjoyed whilst out to in your tractor, car or when you are working the land.

Subscribe to our podcasts through the usual means (Spotify, iTunes etc) and you will be notified when new episodes are issued. Meanwhile, click below for our latest episodes including **'Farming at Altitude with Nature'** with farmer Nia O'Malley, and **'Voices from the Land'** with Tipperary Farmer, Mimi Crawford

[Podcasts](#)

Best Practice Management on Hedgerows

Below is the link to our Best Practice Management Guide to Hedgerows. We thought it was apt to share this considering it is recommended to leave your hedgerows from from the 1st March-31st August in order to provide homes, food sources and corridors for our birds, insects and mammals. Hedgerows are also an important shade for the livestock and shelter belts for these animals and crops. This guides gives you some actions on what you can do on your farm to enhance your hedgerows this springtime.

[Best Practice Guide to HEDGEROWS](#)

In other news:

NPWS Farm Plan Scheme

This may be of interest to many of you. National Parks and Wildlife Service have opened their new Farm Plan Scheme. This helps fund building up biodiversity on your land by creating a biodiversity plan and supporting its development. Deadline for submissions is the 31st March. Link to more information on the scheme [here](#).

The Organic Farming Scheme

The Organic Farming Scheme is now open to new applicants. This provides financial support to farmers to encourage production of organic foods. Deadline for application is the 8th April. More information on the scheme [here](#). You can call the Organic Division on 0539163400 or email organic@agriculture.gov.ie

No Dig Workshops

FFN Ambassador Kate Egan is carrying out workshops on No Dig methods of growing. These No dig workshops and how to grow your own food in an ecologically friendly way that give you healthy plants and nutrient dense food. Based at An Ghrian Glas Farm in Westmeath. Join her for a hands on day of growing and learning. 12th March 10am-4pm. €55. More information or book on 0863070223/anghrianglasfarm@gmail.com

National Organic Training Skillset

The National Organic Training Skillset (NOTS) have a number of online and in-person training courses coming up for farmers and landowners including Organic Growing Principles, Commercial Polytunnel Growing, Syntropic Agroforestry, Holistic Management, Dry Stone Walling amongst others. More information [here](#).

Teagasc, Irish Organic Association and Organic Trust Farm Walks

Covering dairy, beef, sheep, cereals, poultry, vegetable growing and more. These walks are open to farmers to learn more about organic techniques. More information [here](#)

(If you are are a FFN Ambassador or state/relevant body and wish to let our audiences know about an event please do not hesitate to send me details on info@farmingfornature.ie)

About Farming For Nature

The Farming for Nature initiative was established to help acknowledge and support those farmers who farm, or wish to farm, in a way that improves the natural health of our countryside. It was set up by people with a genuine interest in the wellbeing of our rural landscapes, many of whom work on a voluntary basis to build up this network and profile the good practices that are happening across the country. There are ways in which we can all get involved in this initiative, learn more by visiting our website or following us on all the usual social media channels.

www.farmingfornature.ie

Farming for Nature

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