



## Welcome to May-June Farming For Nature Newsletter

Welcome to the May - June edition of our Farming for Nature Newsletter. It's a great time to be out and about in the countryside, currently brimming with energy and life. The dawn chorus seems to get louder and more diverse every morning while every day seems to herald another 'first sighting' of the year - be it a bird, bat, bee or butterfly. The hedges are greening up gradually as later-leafing species add their particular shape and shade of green to the hedgerow mix – a rich palette which is now evolving to include whites of blackthorn (and soon, whitethorn!) and creams of rowan and cherry blossom. It's a super time for dandelions right now, entire fields yellowed over with this important early flower for our pollinators, while on wetter ground the light purple of the cuckoo flower is very prominent. On the farming front, lambs are hurtling about with uncontained exuberance are the young calves, capturing the excitement that the early summer engenders in so many of us. Here at Farming for Nature we're equally enthused, busily recording podcasts and Q&As with our farmer Ambassadors, finalising our best-ever series of summer farm walks – not to be missed – and interviewing our inspirational and diverse 2022

Ambassador nominees. We hope to see you in the months ahead and that you get the space and time to enjoy our beautiful countryside.

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

## **Farming For Nature Ambassador Awards Update**

Earlier this year we received 62 nominations from 23 counties for the 2022 Farming for Nature Ambassador Awards. The standard of this year's nominees has been incredible. It has been really inspiring for us to speak to each of the nominated farmers and to learn more about the great work they are doing to incorporate, protect and enhance nature on their land. Each of these 2022 nominees have made a valuable contribution to the Farming for Nature initiative and we would like to thank them again for their time, support and most of all for the work they do for nature on their farms. We have been sharing their stories far and wide across our social media platforms in an effort to inspire and encourage positive change amongst the farming community here in Ireland and beyond. You can learn more about each of our wonderful 2022 nominee farmers below.

During the months of March and April, we spoke directly to each nominee farmer(s) to learn more about their farming systems and their practices for nature. Now, following a standard set of criteria, we are in the process of putting together a shortlist of nominees who will progress to the next stage in the Ambassador Awards. These shortlisted farms will be visited by a member of our judging panel and a member of the FFN team during the summer months. The purpose of the judges' visit is to give each nominee the opportunity to showcase their farm and their practices for nature.

Later in the summer, we will come together with the judging panel and collectively decide on this year's list of Farming for Nature Ambassadors. An

important point to emphasize is that the Farming for Nature Ambassador Awards are not about winning. As far as we are concerned, every one of our nominated farmers are winners and we want to celebrate each participating farm, giving them the support and recognition that they deserve. Every farmer has a story to tell and a lesson to share. Every farmer who participates in the Farming for Nature initiative becomes an integral member of our countrywide network of nature-friendly farmers.

Having gotten some insight into the inspiring work that our 2022 nominees are doing on their farms, we are very excited to get out and see first-hand the actions that these farmers are taking on their land to support nature. There is a wide variety of farmers engaged with the programme this year – from beef producers to foresters, from market gardeners to stud farmers, from conventional farmers to alternative models of agriculture. Some of the key themes throughout the interviews included conservation grazing, self-sufficiency, soil health and biology, waterway management, ponds, high nature value farming, and more... These farmers have already provided us with tremendous knowledge, insight and practical advice. We will continue to share this knowledge and keep you all updated as we learn from our wonderful community of farmers across the country. Meanwhile, we wanted to share with you some of our favourite quotes from our interviews...

*"I remember once letting cows out into a lovely green field and the first thing they did was go over to the ditch and start eating the nettles. It told me that there is something important there in the hedges that we may not know about, but the animals do."*

*"It's not about reconnecting with nature, it's about realising that we are nature. We are not outside of nature, we are one with nature"*

*"As my father used to say - the closest place you are to God is when you're working with clay"*

*"Biodiversity starts beneath our feet. The biological health of the soil plays a crucial role in increasing biodiversity."*

*"The ancient meadow contains a huge variety of plant species such as red and white clover, meadowsweet, orchids, forget-me-nots, cowslip, primrose, yarrow, plantain,*

*sorrel... Each plant in its own right supports biodiversity on the farm. I am so grateful to have this diversity on the land and I will do my best to protect this"*

*"Farming is a constant process of learning, experimenting, trialling and refinement"*

The Farming For Nature Ambassador Awards 2022 are supported by Bord Bia.

[Meet the 2022 nominees here](#)

## **Farm Walks 2022 now open for bookings**

We are delighted to announce the 2022 season of Farming for Nature farm walks is about to start. These farm walks are an opportunity for our Farming for Nature farmers to showcase their contribution to nature and good farming practices on their land. They are a great opportunity to meet likeminded farmers and to gain an insight into the creative and inspiring ways that farmers can incorporate, protect and enhance nature on their land.

Some of the farm walks are now open for bookings, and we will continue to open bookings on a phased basis throughout the year however you can join the waiting list and we will notify you when bookings are open. So do keep an eye on our social media/website to see possible updates or changes to this schedule as time progresses. The walks cost €10 to attend. This is a not-for-profit initiative and all monies received will be circulated back into the farming community. **Here is the schedule for May & June 2022. To book, click below.**

15th May **Boyd Bryce** Sheep **Donegal**. More information on his farm [here](#).

21-May **Mona Muller** Mixed **Clare** More information on her farm [here](#).

22-May **Thomas Keane** Sheep **Galway** More information on his farm [here](#).

28-May **Michael Hickey** Beef **Tipperary** More information on his farm [here](#).

29-May **Andrew Bergin** Tillage **Kildare** More information on his farm [here](#).

04-Jun **Kate Egan** Horticulture **Westmeath** More information on her farm [here](#).

04-Jun **Anthony Mooney** Beef **Kildare** More information on his farm [here](#).

08-Jun **Louis McAuley** Tillage **Meath** More information on his farm [here](#).

09-Jun **Noel Kiernan** Beef and Sheep **Longford** More information on his farm [here](#).

11-Jun **Fergal Anderson & Manu Russo** Horticulture **Galway** More information on his farm [here](#).

18-Jun **Nicholas Redmond** Mixed **Wexford** More information on his farm [here](#).

[Farm Walks Schedule & Bookings](#)

## Meet some of our new Ambassadors up close

Each newsletter we profile some Ambassadors from the 2021 selection process. This May/June we have four farms representing various farm systems and land types. Welcome please; James Breslin, Nicholas Redmond, Colm Gavin, and Joe & Aoife Reilly.

### James Breslin (Co. Donegal)

James Breslin, an Inishowen hill farmer, runs a suckler and sheep farm in Donegal. He has reintroduced Galloway cattle to his farm as he feels their hardy nature is well suited to the mountainous conditions of the land. “The Galloways work well with the sheep as they like to graze the taller grasses and the sheep like to graze the lower grasses.” Many of the animals live outdoors year-round, feeding on pasture and natural mountain vegetation during the summer months, and hay/silage during the winter. The animals are thriving in this system and it reduces farm inputs like feed and fertilizer. James has resown some of the farmland with red clover swards and multi-species grass swards, further reducing the need for nitrogen fertilizer and increasing biodiversity on the farm – “*when the red clover is in flower, you can hear it before you see it – because of the amount of bees it attracts*”. These diverse swards help build soil fertility and improve soil structure. James has planted hundreds of native trees and continues to plant trees on his farm to create ‘green

barns' which serve as shelter for the animals while outdoors. He has dug 2 ponds on the farm to create a water habitat and encourage further biodiversity. He plans to create a riparian zone by planting trees along the riverbank to protect river water. A member of the of the Operational Group of the Inishowen EIP, James welcomes visitors to his farm to learn more about his farming system. **More information on James's farm below, including a short film.**

[James's Farm](#)

## **Colm Gavin (Co. Mayo)**

Colm Gavin is an 8th generation farmer, farming in the Bundorragha catchment in Mayo. He farms 90-100 Mayo blackface ewes. The sheep are out on the mountain year-round, grazing the multi-species natural vegetation and maintaining the land. Colm operates a very extensive hill farming operation and very few external inputs are required on the farm. Colm is involved in the Pearl Mussel Project EIP. This project rewards participant farmers for the ecological quality of their land, which in turn contributes to the pristine water quality needed by the Freshwater Pearl Mussel. As part of his work in this project, Colm continues to remove invasive rhododendron from the mountain, as well as installing silt traps to capture excess sand/silt runoff from the land before it enters the river. He has also put in livestock bridges at various points along the riverfront to further protect the water quality. *"Being part of the Pearl Mussel Project EIP puts value on land that we wouldn't have considered highly valuable in the past. These areas have actually turned out to be the most important areas on the farm in terms of biodiversity."* Passionate about the beautiful landscape and nature that makes up his farm, Colm sees himself as a caretaker of the land and hopes the pass it on to the next generation in better condition than which he found it; *"as a hill farmer – all you're doing is maintaining the land."* **More information on Colm's farm below. Or learn directly from Colm himself by registering for his online Ask the Farmer Q&A in below section.**

[Colm's Farm](#)

## **Nicholas Redmond (Co. Wexford)**

Nicholas Redmond is a mixed stock organic farmer from north county Wexford. He farms sheep and Dexter cattle. There are also chickens, donkeys and alpacas on the farm. Approximately 18 acres of the land is under forestry – some an old-growth Oak forest and the rest a mixed broadleaf forest. There is an orchard on the farm and the family grow a variety of fruits and vegetables for the home. Nicholas operates an extensive farming system and very few external inputs are used on the farm – no chemical fertilizer, no concentrates and minimal machinery. The pasture on the farm is species-rich grassland. The animals are part of a mixed rotational grazing system. Part of the farm is comprised of a 4-acre traditional hay meadow. This pasture is extremely species-rich and full of native Irish wildflowers and grasses. Nicholas is working with Irish Wildflowers to harvest seed every year from the meadow. These seeds are then redistributed to other farms/areas around the country, helping to ensure the vitality of these species. The variety of different plants and trees around the land make it extremely biodiverse as well as attracting much wildlife. On the farm there are numerous birds such as buzzards, jaybirds, woodpeckers, wrens, robins, finches, blackbirds and thrushes. There are also foxes, badgers, grey squirrel and hedgehogs. Nicholas is passionate about nature conservation and a firm believer that farming activities should not impact in a negative way on the land – “I would see myself as more of a nature warden who is also a farmer.” **More information on Nicholas’s farm below. Or learn directly from Nicholas himself by registering for his online Ask the Farmer Q&A in the section below.**

[Nicholas's Farm](#)

## Joe & Aoife Reilly (Co. Mayo)

Joe and Aoife Reilly of Glasraí Farm run a 7.5 acre organic market garden in Hollymount, county Mayo. Biodiversity is of huge importance on the farm – “We farm with the earth as our core value and encourage a biodiverse, vibrant, healthy eco-system rather than a monoculture farm”. The farm is highly productive not only in terms of food production, but in terms of soil health and wildlife as well. On the farm there are 3 ponds, mixed hedgerows and a variety of trees, all of which provide habitats for wildlife. They promote ‘wild areas’ on the farm where natural vegetation can grow and support insects and birds throughout the year. Soil health is crucial on Glasraí farm.

Cover crops containing diverse plant species are planted in rotation with vegetable crops throughout the year to allow the soil to rest and to regenerate the soil biology. Composting also plays a crucial role in maintaining soil fertility. Glasraí Farm are passionate about providing fresh, healthy food to their local community. The farm produces a vast range of organic herbs and vegetables – from fennel to cauliflower to potatoes and beyond. They sell direct to their customers via farmers markets and online, as well as selling to local cafes and restaurants. Glasraí farm value teamwork – what started off as a family farm now consists of an energetic collaboration of 6 passionate employees – “Having a good team to work with and creating local employment is really important to us”. **More information on Joe & Aoife’s farm below. Or learn directly from Aoife herself by registering for her online Ask the Farmer Q&A in the section below.**

[Joe and Aoife Reilly'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 for the ones you wish to attend.

- 3rd May 2022 8pm **Growing orchards and saving heritage seeds** with Clare farm group Irish Seed Savers. Register [here](#)
- 17th May 2022 8pm **Sheep farming in the uplands with biodiversity in mind** with Mayo farmer Colm Gavin. Register [here](#).
- 31st May 2022 8pm **Running a productive 7.5 acre farm alongside nature** with Mayo farmer Aoife O'Reilly. Register [here](#).
- 14th June 2022 8pm **Low input and low impact on a beef farm** with Monaghan farmer Pat McKenna. Register [here](#).
- 21st June 2022 8pm **Developing my farm as a nature reserve** with Wexford farmer Nicholas Redmond. Register [here](#).

If you missed any of the previous sessions you can either watch them on our YouTube channel or click below.

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

### **Nature's Calendar this Summer**

Have you heard the dawn chorus, seen your first hawthorn in bloom, here it comes - summer with its colourful cloak laying down over the hedges and field margins allowing a hive of insect activity to erupt. There 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 May and June nature calendars below.

[Nature's Calendar - MAY](#)

[Nature's Calendar - JUNE](#)

### **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 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 '**How to get the best from your hedgerows**' with Tipperary farmer Sean O'Farrell, and '**How nature benefits a micro diary & vice versa**' with Mayo Farmer, Sinead Moran. farmer's story with dairy farmer Gearoid Maher in our Voices from the Land podcast series.

[How to get the best from your hedgerows podcast](#)

[How nature benefits a micro diary & vice versa podcast](#)

[Voices from the land with Gearoid Maher podcast](#)

### **Groundtips - advice from farmers for farmers**

This section of our website provides practical advice and tips from farmers in their own words on how they have enhanced nature on their land. We have decided to share a couple of these with you each newsletter. This month we cover Building Soil Fertility with ambassadors Kim McCall explains '**Biochar, a farmer's guide**' and Norman Dunne give his tips on '**Building Soil Fertility on a Tillage Farm**'. See below.

[Groundtips - Building soil fertility](#)

### **Best Practice Management on Species Rich Grasslands**

As the summer months are a great time to look out for a diversity of flowering plants which will help reveal where are your most species-rich grasslands, we thought we would share the below is the link to our Best Practice Management Guide to species rich grasslands to help you get the best out of these areas. Ranging from wet grasslands to hay meadows these areas an important habitat for biodiversity but also a diverse sward can provide many minerals and nutrients for your livestock that might not be available otherwise. This guide gives you some actions on what you can do on your farm to enhance your grasslands this summer.

[Best Practice Guide to Species Rich Grasslands](#)

## **In other news:**

### **National Biodiversity Conference**

Ireland's second National Biodiversity Conference 2022 will be held in Dublin Castle and streamed live online over two days on June 8th & 9th. More information [here](#).

### **Festival of Farmland Biodiversity**

The National Biodiversity Data Centre is hosting a month-long (virtual) Festival of Farmland Biodiversity for May 2022. The Festival of Farmland Biodiversity will focus on challenges to addressing the biodiversity crisis across much of the farmed landscape in Ireland. More information [here](#). Furthermore farmers can share biodiversity friendly actions on their farm using the social media tag #farmlandbiodiversity and will be entered into a competition throughout May.

### **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 Commercial Polytunnel Growing, Holistic Management Fundamentals amongst others. More information [here](#).

### **Brookfield Field Exchanges**

FFN Ambassador, Ailbhe Gerrard is organising a series of walks and workshops on her farm in Co. Tipperary to exchange ideas on food production, climate change, creativity and more. From dry stone walling to beekeeping, micro dairying to soil fertility and more. More information on these events and how to register [here](#).

### **Farmertime**

Airfield Estate in Dublin run a scheme with farmers throughout Ireland whereby they can stream live from their farm to primary schools and inform the upcoming generations about where their food comes from and what it means to be a

farmer. This initiative, 'Farmertime' is looking for farmers to donate their time to the project. So if you are a farmer or a primary school teacher looking for more information on joining this initiative please go [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](mailto:info@farmingfornature.ie))**

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### **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](http://www.farmingfornature.ie)

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