



## Welcome to July-August Farming For Nature Newsletter

Welcome to the July - August edition of the Farming for Nature Newsletter, containing news and upcoming events, helpful nature-friendly tips for your farm, and other useful resources - including words of wisdom from our inspiring farmers!

This is the time of the year when the countryside is really flourishing and is such a pleasure to behold and partake in. Growth rates around now are extraordinary – see how quickly the fields green-up again after being shorn for hay or silage; witness the abundance of the hedgerows where elder blooms and brambles flower; see how lambs, foals and calves thrive so well on the verdant growth, naturally weaning from mother's milk. It's a busy time for farmers – the last of the shearing, ongoing work to save the silage and hay, peak harvest for many vegetable growers, peak milking time too. Thank goodness its school holiday time when extra help is hopefully available! It's also a season of fairs and festivals and a time when local

GAA teams are really gearing up for the competitive season. Nature too is full of competition right now, with species-rich meadows spilling over with clovers, selfheal, ox eye daisies and a multitude of grasses all vying for space, while the skies are busy with swallows, skylarks, bees, butterflies, damselflies and – on the night shift – bats. Take some time out from your busy life to sit in nature and be absorbed by the rampant summer life around you. Better still, join one of our current series of farm walks which provide a unique insight to our wonderful countryside in the company of those who are responsible for its care.

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

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

As outlined in our previous newsletter, we received 64 nominations for this year's Farming for Nature Ambassador Awards. While the standard of nominees across the board is outstanding this year, we have put together a shortlist of nominees who progressed to the next stage in the Ambassador Awards. Between June and July, our judging panel are out and about visiting our shortlisted farms across the country, in order to learn more about the incredible work they are doing to incorporate, protect and enhance nature on their land. We have also sent Lucy, a member of our own team, out to meet our shortlisted nominee farmers which has further given us the opportunity to learn first-hand the various ways in which our farming community are working to increase biodiversity and support nature on their land.

Feedback from the farm visits so far has been extremely positive. The diversity of this year's nominee farms is wonderful and it has been very exciting to see these farmers support nature on their land with such a strong sense of innovation, creativity, passion and care. This is what Lucy has to say about her farm visits so far; *"I'm only halfway through my FFN farm visits this year, and so far the journey has taken me from a vineyard in Waterford to an esker in Westmeath where I saw some of the*

*mightiest hawthorn trees I've ever seen. I saw the beautiful Kerry Violet on a windy hill down on the Dingle Peninsula and I met some of the happiest dairy cows in a meadow in Limerick. Up in Leitrim I saw the remains of an ancient sweat lodge and a new-born Dexter calf galloping across a field full of cuckoo flowers. I have learned about the old skill of hedge-laying and intricacies of stud farming. I have heard the skylark and seen deer roaming the hills. I have learned about soil health and cover crops. I've seen grassland, ponds, callows, bogs, heath, meadows and woodlands. I've met goats, sheep, horses, cows, chickens and more. I have been continuously inspired by the creative ways in which farmers are supporting nature, all the while producing food and creating a livelihood for themselves and their families.*

*Finally, to mention all the incredible people I have met along the way, who have opened their farms to me and walked the land explaining their farming systems and pointing out the habitats, the wildlife, the stock and the heritage features. Not to mention the cups of tea and the chats. Thank you to everyone who has so kindly hosted me so far, we are so grateful for your support to the FFN project, which would not be possible without the wonderful farmers who make it what it is." Once the farm visits are complete and every shortlisted nominee has had the opportunity to showcase their farm and elaborate further on their farming system and practices for nature, we will then come together with the judging panel and collectively decide on this year's list of Farming for Nature Ambassadors. At this point we will also create a final shortlist for the 2022 Farming for Nature Public Awards which will take place in October.*

We continue to share 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. We would like to take this opportunity to again thank all of our wonderful nominee farmers for their support and for the admirable work they continue to do on their land to protect, enhance and support nature.

The Farming For Nature Ambassador Awards 2022 are supported by Bord Bia. You can learn more about our 2022 nominees below.

[Meet the 2022 nominees here](#)

## **Farm Walks are in full swing**

Our farm walk schedule kicked off in May and we are in full swing as we approach the height of the summer season. It has been great to get out and about again, and what better opportunity to learn about the work farmers are doing to support nature on their land than on a Farming for Nature farm walk. These walks are educational, inspiring and diverse. They are a great way to meet other like-minded farmers and people, and a truly wonderful opportunity to see and learn first-hand the actions that farmers are taking to support biodiversity and wildlife on their farms. There is a broad range of farm walks taking place this year, so whether your interest is in dairy, tillage, horticulture, forestry, beef, hill farming or beyond – we have a walk to suit!

We want to thank our FFN ambassadors who have hosted walks so far – Boyd Bryce, Mona Muller, Michael Hickey, Andrew Bergin, Fergal Anderson & Manu Russo, Noel Kiernan and Nicholas Redmond. Below is **the schedule and booking options for July & August. To book click on button below.** Please help us get the word out by sharing this with your neighbours, friends, network and community.

- 01-July 2pm Kate Egan Horticulture Westmeath** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 2nd July 2pm Kim and Mirielle McCall Mixed stock Kildare** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 9th July 11am Stephen Morrison Beef Kildare** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 16th July 11am Sean O'Farrell Mixed stock Tipperary** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 22nd July 2pm Ailbhe Gerard Sheep, Forestry & Bees Tipperary** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 23rd July Time 2pm Norman & Michael Dunne Tillage Kildare** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 23rd July 11am Cathal Mooney Mixed stock Donegal** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 30th July 2pm Ger Deegan Forestry & stock Westmeath** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 6th August 11am Pat McKenna Beef Monaghan** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 13th August 11am Oliver Nagle Beef Clare** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 20th August 2pm Thomas and Claire O'Connor Horticulture Kerry** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)
- 27th August 11am Gearoid Maher Dairy Limerick** BUY TICKET [HERE](#)

Full information on walks below.

## Meet some of our new Ambassadors up close

Each newsletter we profile some Ambassadors from the 2021 selection process. This July/August we have three farms representing various farm systems and land types. Welcome please; Pat McKenna, The Muller Family, and Graham Harris

### Pat McKenna (Co. Monaghan)

Pat McKenna farms a Dexter suckler herd in Co. Monaghan. The farm is situated on 60 acres of marginal land at the foothills of Sliabh Beagh.

The herd consists of about 90 cattle and Pat operates a calf to beef system.

The premium Dexter beef is sold direct to restaurants and local customers. Pat is passionate about the Dexter breed; their smaller size and hardy nature makes them perfect grazers for the hilly land around Sliabh Beagh. *“Using cattle and a conservation grazing system on the mountain aims to improve the habitat by breaking down the pasture, loosening it and opening it up.”* This means there is more life on the ground thus providing a better chance for ground nesting birds. Pat operates a low impact grazing system on his own farm. No chemical fertilizer is used on the land. The only inputs are farmyard manure, slurry and dry bedding. Pat's farm is located in a curlew protected area, so he does not cut any grass until July/August. There is a traditional hay meadow on the farm of about 7 acres. Twelve acres of broadleaf forestry planted 8 years ago, which provides a habitat for many birds and creatures. There are hares, badgers, grouse and pheasant on the land. Pat is passionate about low-impact, high nature value farming – *“I see my farm as a habitat - and I farm in ways that encourage wildlife on to the farm.”* **More information on Pat's farm below. You can listen to a recording of Pat's recent Q&A on our YouTube Channel - link to this in the below section.**

[Pat's Farm](#)

## **Muller Family (Co. Clare)**

Mona and Harry Muller, along with their four children, farm 38.5 hectares of wet grassland in the Slieve Aughty Mountains in Co.Clare. *“The areas of wetland on the farm provide great biodiversity, but the land needs farming in a very sensitive way.”* The farm is certified organic and guided by biodynamic principles. On the farm there are horses, goats, sheep, cattle, hens, ducks, turkeys and bees. The animals play an important role in grazing the natural mountain vegetation and providing fertilizer for soil regeneration. Meat, eggs, milk, yogurt and cheese is sold direct to the local community via a small on-site farm shop. There is a horticulture enterprise on the farm as well - organic vegetables are sold direct to local customers and the Mullers grow heritage vegetable seeds for Irish Seed Savers. There is a heritage orchard on the farm with apples, pears and plums. External inputs on the farm are extremely low. Fodder crops and cereals are grown on the land to provide winter feed for the animals. The Mullers use draft horses to plough the land in place of machinery where possible. There is an area of native woodland by the river that attracts much wildlife to the farm. The family have worked hard to create a self-sufficient farm that is ecologically and economically viable. *“We see our farm as an organism. Where all the different animals and all the different enterprises interlink and support each other and work with each other.”* **More information on the Muller’s farm below. Or learn directly from Mona Muller herself by registering for her online Ask the Farmer Q&A in below section.**

[Mullers' Farm](#)

## **Graham Harris (Co. Kildare)**

Graham Harris took over the family farm in 2003 and continued to farm the land conventionally until about 5 years ago. Since then, he has been gradually moving away from intensive systems towards holistic, regenerative practices. Guided by biodynamic principles, Graham has been focusing on *“removing as many harmful practices from his farming system as possible”*. The farm is now certified organic. In order to bring the land back into balance, huge focus has been on rebuilding the soil microbiology – *“I*

*firmly believe if I can get the soil right, then I don’t have to worry about much else.”* The 170-acre farm is comprised of a mixed sheep and tillage enterprise. Cereals produced include organic oats, along with pea and barley combi-crops for animal feed. Graham uses a diverse variety of cover crops on the land throughout rotations – *“incorporating cover crops that feed the soil and feed the pollinators.”* Aiming to move away from mono-cropping, Graham has started experimenting with growing an understory of clover with the oat crops. Farmyard manure is composted and spread on the land as a fertilizer when necessary. Biodynamic preparations are also used on the land to regenerate the soil biology. Graham runs a flock of 130 Belclare/Charollais ewes, producing organic spring lamb. He has incorporated herbal leys into the grassland to increase plant diversity and build soil biology. Where in the past nettles and weeds would have been sprayed, Graham now encourages wild patches of plants to grow around field boundaries which act as nature corridors and provide habitats for birds and insects. **More information on**

**Graham’s farm below. Or learn directly from Graham himself by registering for his online Ask the Farmer Q&A in the section below.**

[Graham's Farm](#)

### **Ask the Farmer Q&A continues**

We are coming to the end of our series of ‘Ask the Farmer’. These ‘live’ evening sessions have taken 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 has been 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 experiences of farming alongside nature. We are grateful to all the Ambassadors that have contributed to this series.

Here are our remaining sessions for this season. Please register. Whilst we are taking a break for the summer period hope to resume these again in November with a new set of Ambassadors.

- **5th July 2022 8pm Soil regeneration on a tillage and sheep farm** with Kildare farmer Graham Harris. Register [here](#)
- **19th July 2022 8pm Achieving self sustainability on a mixed stock farm** with Clare farmer Mona Muller. 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**

Hedgehogs snuffling in the hedgerows, the sweetness of Meadowsweet in the air or sightings of the corncrake in the meadows. These 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 to help nature, see our July and August nature calendars below.

[Nature's Calendar - JULY](#)



## [Nature's Calendar - AUGUST](#)

### **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 on '**How to attract bat life to the farm**' with Roscommon farmer Tommy Earley, and '**Voices from the land**' a farmer's story with mixed stock farmer Nicholas Redmond.

[How to attract batlife to the farm podcast](#)

[Voices from the land with Nicholas Redmond 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 these with you each newsletter. This month we cover **Agroforestry and Silvopasture** with ambassador Clive Bright. See below.

[Groundtips - Agroforestry and silvopasture](#)

## **Forum**

This section of our website is for farmers to ask questions and share information around farming for nature. Whilst it is primarily for farmers we welcome users that are able to contribute from related fields. Recent queries include *'How do I manage my docks?'* *'Looking for participants on a wilding research project'* and *'What is the best way to line my pond'*. To view any of these or to put your pressing questions on the Forum just go to the below link, register your email and then you are go to go!

[Forum](#)

## **Case Study: Rewilding**

There's been a lot of talk about rewilding and we have been getting a lot of enquiries about it, so we decided to take a closer look ourselves. Randal Plunkett, a nominee in 2021, has a rewilding project on his land in Co.Meath. Here is a short film we made on his farm. What are your thoughts on rewilding? Do send us your comments on our social media channels.

[Rewilding with Randal Plunkett](#)

## **Best Practice Guidelines on Watercourse Management**

Have you got time this summer to look at your watercourses and identify how you get the best out of these areas. Ranging from rivers and streams to ponds and lakes these areas an important habitat for biodiversity but can also provide clean healthy water for livestock as well as reducing the flood risk on your farm. This guide gives you some actions on what you can do on your farm to enhance your watercourses this summer.

## **In other news:**

### **ACRES**

The Department of Agriculture has announced new contracts that will start on January 1, 2023. This new national agri-environment scheme will be known as the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES). There are two entry approaches in this proposed new scheme. The first is an ACRES 'general approach', available nationally, which offers a range of measures (both targeted and general); and the second is an ACRES co-operation approach, available to farmers in defined high-priority geographical areas. Farmers will receive support directly under this scheme to deliver measurable climate, biodiversity, and water quality gains.

### **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 Natural Korean Farming, Farm Homeopathy, Organic Production Principles amongst others. More information [here](#).

### **Gearoid Maher**

Congratulations to Farming For Nature Ambassador, Gearoid Maher, who was awarded the overall milk quality winner in Dairygold Co Op last month and will represent Dairygold in the National Dairy Council (NDC) awards, a big deal amongst dairy farmers.

### **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](#).

## **Teagasc, Irish Organic Association and Organic Trust Farm Walks**

Covering 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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