



## Welcome to the Spring Farming For Nature Newsletter

Welcome to our first quarterly newsletter of the year, auspiciously timed to coincide with St Brigid's Day. Now a National holiday, Lá Fhéile Bríde had its origins in the Celtic Imbolc festival of fertility, and marked the beginning of spring, ushering in a new season of hope and growth. Here at Farming for Nature it's also a time of stocktaking and renewal, as we reflect and build on the year past, and commit ourselves to the year ahead.

In this edition of our Newsletter, we bring you some of the plans and ambitions that we have for this coming year, as well as continuing to celebrate our wonderful Ambassadors and share their inspiring stories.

2023 does promise to be an interesting year on the farming-for-nature front: two new 'CAPs' come into place – the 'Common Agricultural Policy' with its much-heralded Eco-Scheme, ACRES and Organic schemes, plus significant changes to land eligibility rules; as well as the 'Climate Action Plan' ('CAP23') which – with its 25% emissions ceiling for agriculture – may also entail major changes in how we farm. Along with the new Forestry Programme, the upcoming EU Nature Restoration Law and the outcomes of the recent COP15

Biodiversity summit, there certainly seems to be no shortage of policies, plans and targets to address our climate and biodiversity crises.

Translating policy into practice – and impact – is another matter entirely however, and won't be easy given the urgency of the situation and the distrust - and in some quarters, disdain – with which many policymakers and their policies are sometimes held by farmers. These farmers will be at the coalface of this tidal wave of policy change and will need to be engaged and empowered to take ownership of an agenda from which they all too often feel excluded.

Reimagining farming - in a way that recognises farmers as more than commodity producers - and realising the opportunities within the challenges that we all face, will continue to be the focus of Farming for Nature's work in 2023. We hope to do this by sharing the solutions that exist on the ground and giving voice to those most-critical of changemakers, our farmers, as well as advocating for practical research and enabling policies. We hope you will join us during what promises to be a roller-coaster of a year in 2023, we could really use your support.

## **Practical actions for climate for various farming systems**

We recently launched our new document on how to take action on your farm to help both mitigate against and adapt to climate change. These tips are from our farmers, but compiled by us and backed up by science. **For simplicity we have sorted these actions according to farming systems – just click on the one that is most relevant to you below:**

[Dairy](#) [Tillage](#) [Beef](#) [Horticulture](#) [Sheep](#)

[Equine](#) [Pig](#) [Poultry](#)

If you have any feedback or suggestions for this document please do not hesitate to email us on [info@farmingfornature.ie](mailto:info@farmingfornature.ie)

Thanks to all our farmers who contributed their stories and tips to this document.

## **Practical actions for biodiversity for various habitats**

We recently updated all the information on our website to bring you the most current and up to date suggestions on what you can do on your farm for nature depending on the habitats that you have on your land. Please see these here:

[Field Boundaries](#)   [Grasslands](#)   [Peatlands](#)

[Arable lands](#)   [Wetlands, Ponds & Waterways](#)   [Woodlands](#)

If you have any feedback or suggestions for practical actions that can be included in these sections, please do not hesitate to email us on [info@farmingfornature.ie](mailto:info@farmingfornature.ie)

## **Meet some of our new Ambassadors up close**

Each newsletter we feature some of our most recent Ambassadors who have joined our network. This edition, we are delighted to welcome; Cathal & Bronagh O'Rourke, David Dennison, and Maurice Deasy.

### **February Ambassadors: Cathal & Bronagh O' Rourke**

Cathal and Bronagh O'Rourke, along with their three daughters, manage a 500-acre farm in the east Burren County Clare. Their cattle finishing farming system is complemented by a successful on-site agri-tourism business. The farm is a mix of green land, mature hazel woodland, limestone pavement, turlough and species rich grassland. Part of the farm is within the Burren National Park and Lough Bunny is situated adjacent to the farm. The O'Rourke family are part of the Burren Programme where they take numerous actions to support nature and wildlife on the land. These include clearing scrub pathways to reconnect grazable areas, grazing cattle on the Winterage to encourage the growth of native Burren flora and reducing inputs in the improved agricultural areas of the farm. Some of their beef produce is sold direct to customers which has proven to be a successful alternative route-to-market option. They are also participants in the Hare's Corer Project

which involves the planting of native Burren Pine on the land. Cathal and Bronagh are passionate about educating people on the natural beauty, the flora and fauna, and the local heritage of the Burren region. There is an abundance of birds on the land including the occasional Hen Harrier. They describe their way of farming as a lifestyle which respects and enhances the land of which they are custodians of. **Listen to a recording of Cathal's Q&A on YouTube [here](#).**

### **March Ambassador: David Dennison**

David Dennison runs a vineyard and orchard in County Waterford. David is the founder of Viking Irish Drinks, producing craft wine and cider on his farm in Waterford. The 1-hectare vineyard, which was planted in 2010, provides red and white grapes for wine. There are 2.2 hectares of cider apple trees which produce craft cider. David also produce liqueurs and is now experimenting with alcohol-free beverages. He grows blackcurrants and blackberries on the land, as well as keeping some hives of honeybees. The entire system is managed with huge sensitivity towards nature and wildlife on the land. David is in the process of Organic conversion; however no chemical sprays have been used on the farm in 20 years. There are different habitats on the farm including woodland areas, meadows, thick hedgerows and 1.5 acres of wetland. Research by the National Biodiversity Data Centre found very healthy populations of insects on the land, including bees, hoverflies and beetles. An array of different birds live on the farm including jays, thrushes, swallows, buzzards, snipe, woodcock, goldfinches and hen pheasants. The farm also contains a reed-bed system to clean wastewater from the wine and cider production. In 2008 David planted an area of nut trees including hazelnuts, cobnuts and walnuts in an effort to provide habitat for red squirrel on the land. **Join us for an online Q&A with David next Tuesday evening at 8pm, just register [here](#)**

### **April Ambassador: Maurice Deasy**

Maurice Deasy farms in partnership with his father Ruaidhri in northwest Tipperary. Their 120-acre mixed farm is a sheep and tillage operation. Crops grown include winter barley and oats, spring barley, malting barley and beans. In recent years the Deasys have been implementing the principles of conservation agriculture on their land – direct drilling, crop rotation and cover cropping. This work is being done to regenerate and protect the soil biology. Maurice has been growing heritage Irish grains to preserve their

genetic diversity and maintain their heritage. While these grains are lower yielding, their larger root systems provide crucial disease and drought resistance. "The heritage grains give a better flavour to the finished beer product. I have found they also have higher disease resistance." The heritage grains are processed and malted on-site and made into a single-source farmhouse beer. Maurice is also experimenting with biological seed coatings made from biochar and seaweed to reduce inputs and adopt more natural farming processes. There are 80 breeding ewes on the farm. Some of the grassland is permanent pasture and Maurice is reseeding some of the pasture with multispecies swards. There is approximately 20 acres of mixed woodland on the farm which attracts lots of birds to the land. Hedgerows are managed for biodiversity and act as nature corridors running throughout the land. There is an area of wet/boggy land which has been fenced off and left for biodiversity. A river runs through the farm and there is a pond on the land. On the farm there are deer, woodcock, snipe, pheasant, kingfisher and otter.

**Join us for an online Q&A with Maurice on the 21st February at 8pm, just register [here](#)**

[Read about all our Ambassadors here](#)

## More 'Ask the Farmer Q&As' this Spring

The 'Ask the Farmer' series continues this Spring with a number of our new Ambassadors telling us about their farm and farming system and to answer your pressing questions about farming for nature on a fortnightly basis. These sessions will be every other Tuesday at 8pm and include a short interview 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.

### Upcoming Q&As:

- 7th February 2023 8pm *Developing a drinks business from a farm* with Waterford farmer David Dennison.

- 21st February 2023 8pm ***Converting to Conservation Agriculture and Heritage grains for malting and brewing*** with Tipperary farmer Maurice Deasy.
- 7th March 2023 8pm ***Nut farming and agroforestry*** with Cork farmer Paul McCormick.
- 18th April 2023 8pm ***Virtual Fencing*** with Dr Barry O'Donoghue, Eileen Condon and James Gilmartin.

If you missed any of our previous Q&A sessions you can listen to at your leisure. These are all available on our YouTube channel [here](#).

[Register for our Q&As here](#)

## Nature's Calendar this Spring

As we move into Spring, birds have begun looking for nesting sites, perhaps you can build or source nest boxes to help them. We also are starting to see signs of the primrose and lesser celandine, barnacle geese as well as hazel flowers and colts foot. This is also a good time to have a think about your woodland and whether you have the space to expand it at all - by planting or natural regeneration. For more information on what wildlife to look out for and what practical actions you can take on your farm to help nature this Spring, see our nature calendar below.

[Nature's Calendar - SPRING](#)

## Farming For Nature Podcasts

These podcasts 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 on your tractor, milking the cows or when you are working the land - basically at a time and place that suits you. 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 episode on '***Making a living on 7.5 acres***' with Mayo farmer Aoife Reilly. Please rate, review and share in order to help get the message out there.

['Making a living on 7.5 acres' 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. Each newsletter we like to share one of these opinion pieces with you. This month we are covering ***Holistic Planned Grazing*** with ambassadors Clive Bright and John McHugh. Click below to see how and why they think you should consider this type of grazing for your farm - how it might both improve your land, your animals and your bank account.

[Groundtips - Holistic Planned Grazing](#)

## **Forum**

This is safe space for farmers to ask questions and share information around farming for nature. It is set up to encourage and support farmers that are or wish to

include nature more in their farming practices. Whilst it is primarily for farmers we welcome users that are able to contribute from related fields.

Most recent queries include:

*[Barn Owl Nest box sites needed in Co.Louth](#)*

*[Organic Farmers - benefits and barriers survey now live](#)*

*[Organic sheep farming on commonage - any payments?](#)*

[Forum](#)

## Coming up:

### **The Horses Mouth**

Farming For Nature hope to invite applications for our Horse's Mouth programme this March. This programme funds farmers to have an Ambassador visit them and give them advice and practical tips on what they can do for nature on their land. For full information on when this programme will be open for applications please keep an eye on our website and social media. More information [here](#)

### **Farmers in the Classroom Education programme**

We have begun to set the wheels in motion to have farmers visit classrooms virtually to give primary and secondary students the opportunity to ask them questions. This will be further developed and launched this Spring. For full information on when this programme will be open please keep an eye on our website and social media.

## Farming For Nature

Farming for Nature is an independent initiative set up to inspire and encourage farmers that farm or wish to farm more for nature. We would love to hear any ideas, suggestions or feedback you have. Just contact us through the below website



or social media platform. Hosted by the charity Burrenbeo Trust and funded by  
NPWS, DAFM and An Bord Bia

[www.farmingfornature.ie](http://www.farmingfornature.ie)



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