



## Welcome to the Summer Farming For Nature Newsletter

Welcome to the summer edition of our Farming for Nature Newsletter.

This has to be the most wonderful time of the year to be out and about, as the countryside seems to be almost 'giddy' with life. The rich cacophony of birdsong from dawn to dusk. The sweet scents of whitethorn and wild garlic in the air. The joyful meanderings of brimstone and orange-tip butterflies and the frantic busyness of bees. Meadows dotted with cowslips, bogbean flowers emerging from wetlands, hedgerows bedecked with whitethorn blossoms and the shy flowers of holly and spindle. A walk at dusk reveals foraging bats and hedgehogs, dandelion seed heads like little lightbulbs to guide your way.

It's an upbeat time on the farming front too, the flush of early summer growth affording reassurance that another winter has been survived and the promise of a better year ahead. Livestock are back out on grass where they are most content, crops are emerging from the warming soils and thoughts are turning to saving silage for the winter ahead – there is little time to rest from the cycle of farming life.

Here at Farming for Nature we're equally invigorated by the season that's in it. We have lots of plans for the summer ahead and we'd love you to join us, on-line or in-person, as we celebrate the richness of the relationship that farming and nature can engender when – as with our farming for nature ambassadors – we get it right. So please read on and help spread the word about farming for nature.

## **The Horse's Mouth is now open for applications -Farmer to Farmer Mentorship**

We are delighted to announce our farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing and mentorship service is now open again for applications. This is aimed at supporting farmers and landowners who may be looking for on-the-ground practical advice from fellow farmers on how they might improve their land's biodiversity and be productive farmers.

This is in response to the many queries we have received from farmers and landowners who are seeking on-site advice about how to enhance the biodiversity of their land but aren't quite sure how best to proceed. Though every farm is different, you can't underestimate the value of some sound practical advice and encouragement from a fellow farmer. **We are now offering 50 FARMS ACROSS IRELAND the opportunity to be visited by a fellow farmer. All you have to do is fill out the below form.**

Farming For Nature has a network of Ambassadors farmers who have offered their time and expertise to be mentors on this programme. 'The Horse's Mouth' pilot project will involve one of these mentors walking the land with the owner and sharing simple, practical advice and encouragement. We pay for their time, you just have to pay €50 for their travel. In order to be considered as a host for a visit by a mentor, please visit our website and fill out the short application form. **Deadlines for applications is 10th June 2023.** More information and application form below.

[The Horse's Mouth Mentorship](#)

## 2023 Farm Walks now open for bookings

Onsight Insights are a series of farm walks whereby a number of our Farming for Nature (FFN) Ambassadors will showcase their contribution to nature and good farming practices on their land, as well as highlight their practical on-farm actions to support biodiversity and climate.

We have put together a provisional schedule for June – September 2023. Here are the walks for this quarter. Please book on the below link.

- **3rd June** 2pm James Ham Co. Westmeath *“Hedgerow management and incorporating trees into farming systems”*
- **14th June** 6:30pm Sean Condon Co. Limerick *“Low input dairy farming and building a direct selling model”*
- **24th June** 2pm Aonghus O Coistealbha Co. Galway *“Small scale market gardening, building soil health and growing nutritionally dense vegetables”*
- **1st July** 2pm Gerry Fitzsimons Co. Cavan *“Grass-fed beef farming and building habitats to support biodiversity”*
- **8th July** 11am Sinead Moran Co. Mayo *“Small-scale dairying that works ecologically and economically”*
- **15th July** 2pm Maurice Deasy Co. Tipperary *“Min-till cereal production and growing heritage grains”*
- **23rd July** 11am Cathal & Bronagh O’Rourke Co. Clare *“Conservation farming and farm diversification in the Burren”*

A huge thank you to our wonderful farmers who have signed up to host a walk on their farm this year. We look forward to seeing you around the country this summer.

Farm Walks

## Ambassador Awards 2023 Update

Our annual Ambassador Awards have been running since 2018, and this year the FFN team decided to take a 'pause and reflect' year of sorts – giving ourselves an opportunity to review our Ambassador Awards process and to see how we could develop and strengthen this programme going forward. But fear not, we will still welcome a wonderful array of new Ambassadors on board in September of this year, where we will run a public vote campaign and celebrate these wonderful farmers at our annual Awards Ceremony in the Burren in October.

The difference being, this January, we did not put out our usual call to our nominator network to put forward new farmers to take part in the Ambassador Awards. This year, we have focused on previously nominated farmers – revisiting those who were nominated in the past to see how their farms have progressed since and whether they are more suitable to join the Ambassador network after gaining a few years experience and growth.

Additionally, as we received such a fantastic cohort of nominations last year, we have saved some of those wonderful farmers who will be officially welcomed on board as Ambassadors in September 2023. Stay tuned!

We are taking this year to reflect on the Ambassador Awards, to identify geographic and sectoral gaps in our network, and to figure out ways to strengthen our programme – so we can continue to efficiently and effectively seek, celebrate and support the many farmers who are doing invaluable work for nature on their land, and to help said farmers share their knowledge, practical advice and wisdom with you all.

We will resume the Ambassador Awards again in 2024 where we will continue to recruit new farmers to come on board as Farming for Nature Ambassadors.

The Farming for Nature Ambassador Awards are supported by Bord Bia.

## Meet some of our 2022 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; Paul McCormick and Jacinta French, Pat Mulrooney, and Gerry Fitzsimons.

### May Ambassadors: Paul McCormick & Jacinta French (Co. Cork)

Paul and Jacinta run a 30-acre mixed farm near Skibbereen County Cork. There is about 16 acres of grassland and 14 acres of mixed woodland on the farm. Some of the woodland is mature with old native trees and other parts were planted by Paul and Jacinta over the years. Having previously run a tree nursery, they experiment with different trees such as cobnut, chestnut, walnut and heartnut trees. They breed a small herd of Droimeann cattle, producing high quality beef that is sold direct to neighbours and friends. Interested in agroforestry, Paul has spent a number of years converting parts of the woodland to a pasture-based wood. Meaning the animals graze the woodland during the summer and autumn season, but in the spring the woodland is left to give spring flowers the opportunity to bloom. Paul and Jacinta are also working hard to re-diversify the grassland as much as possible. One way they are doing this is by feeding a specifically selected multi-species hay to the cattle over the summer months, in the hope that the cattle will help to reintroduce these different grass species back into the seedbank of the soil. Paul and Jacinta take deep consideration for biodiversity and wildlife with every decision they make on the land. There are a few ponds on the land and a river also flows through the farm. Other valuable habitats include the permanent pasture, woodland, a riparian zone along the riverfront and areas of rewilded land. They are delighted to witness the return of bird species like the tree creeper, the red pole, the goldcrest and buzzards to the farm. **Listen to Paul talk about actions for nature on his farm [here](#).**

### June Ambassador: Pat Mulrooney (Co. Tipperary)

Pat Mulrooney is a lifelong farmer who runs an organic dairy farm near Clonmel County Tipperary. Originally a conventional tillage farmer, Pat transitioned to

organic in 1987 and now runs a dairy system, milking approximately 90 cows. Pat is a founding member of the organic dairy co-op The Little Milk Company, and approximately 90% of his milk is supplied to this dairy to produce organic Irish cheese. Pat also grows 20 acres of organic oats for Flahavans. A pioneer in organic dairy farming in Ireland, Pat has used no artificial sprays or nitrogen on his land in over 30 years. Veterinary intervention is used only when absolutely necessary. The farm is managed in the most extensive manner possible while remaining within the parameters of a commercial organic dairy farm. A nature lover his entire life, Pat has taken numerous actions on his farm to protect and enhance nature on the land. Hedgerows are managed for wildlife and biodiversity. Multispecies mature pastures provide habitat for insects as well as varied diet for his livestock. Areas of meadow and mature woodland also provide a crucial habitat for insects and birds on the land. **Listen to Pat talk about actions for nature on his farm [here](#)**

### **July Ambassador: Gerry Fitzsimons (Co. Cavan)**

Gerry Fitzsimons is an organic beef farmer from Co Cavan. Having farmed conventionally for some years and seeing the damage that some of the conventional farming practices were having on nature on his land, he decided to go organic and farm in a more holistic manner. Gerry used to run suckler farm, but he now buys in a small number of angus bullocks every year and fattens them on the farm before selling them, mostly direct to customers via his meat scheme. Gerry has been running a grass-fed beef system for some 20 years. There is about 6 acres of birch woodland on the farm, and the land ranges from some good grassland to heavy land to bogland. Even though a lot of the grassland was reseeded in the 90s, a lot of plant diversity has returned to the pasture and Gerry now has some good multi species pasture again. The farming system is very extensive and external inputs are minimal. The cattle are in for a very short period over winter where they are bedded on rushes cut from the land. Some haylage is cut every year to supplement winter feeding. There is lots of space for biodiversity and wildlife on the farm, from bog and ponds to thick hedges, pockets of woodland and an orchard. Gerry is delighted to have a pair of nesting buzzards on the land. There are lots of frogs and newts on the farm, as well as badgers, foxes, rabbits and hares. Gerry and his family take a holistic approach to life and are passionate about protecting nature in any way possible – “Anything that I can do to encourage better care of our environment, on or off the farm, I’m happy

to do it.” **Gerry will be holding a farm walk on his land this summer. More information in above 'Farm Walks' section.**

[Full Network of Farmers here](#)

## **Webinar on Virtual Fencing**

If you have an interest in Virtual Fencing and how it works in conservation agriculture, please see a recording of our recent webinar on it here. Thanks to Dr Barry O'Donoghue (NPWS) for the overview of virtual fencing and their project and farmers Eileen Condon and James Gilmartin for giving their personal experience of how it works in practicality.

**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](#).**

[Webinar on virtual fencing - recording available here](#)

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

As we arrive into the celtic Summer, birds are busy nesting, keep an eye out for the African arrivals like swift who will be looking for their old patches. The hedgerows are alive with colours as spindle, guelderrose, whitethorn and crab apple bloom and the meadows have an equal amount of colour and diversity for pollinators - can you help them by doing a 'NoMowMay' and leave it grow. 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.

## 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 episodes:

***Composting*** with Jim Cronin

***Rehabilitating an intensive farm*** with Colm Flynn

***The Tree Farmer*** with James Ham

***Rewilding*** with Eoghan Daltun

Please rate, review and share in order to help get the message out there.

'Composting' podcast

'Rehabilitating an intensive farm' podcast

'The Tree Farmer' podcast



['Rewilding' 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 ***Min Till & Low Crop Disturbance*** with ambassadors Thomas Fouhy and Andrew Bergin. Click below to see how and why they think you should consider this type of treatment for your farm - how it might both improve your land and your bank account.

[Min Till and Low Crop Disturbance Establishment](#)

## 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:

[\*Looking for natural regeneration researchers\*](#)

[\*Want to volunteer on a dairy farm\*](#)

[\*True carbon neutral forestry\*](#)

[Forum](#)

## Other events

**The National Organic Training Skillset** organisation have a number a courses on these months that include our ambassadors such as - *Introduction to Biodynamic Farming* (Trevor Harris), *Starting a farm from scratch* (Cathal Mooney), *Direct Marketing your Produce* (Cathal Mooney), *Holistic Plan Training* (Clive Bright), *Natural Korean Farming* (Thomas Stack). See these and much more [here](#).

**Burren in Bloom** - this is a series of events running throughout May in the Burren to celebrate the rich biodiversity and farming heritage of the region. More information [here](#)

**Farmland Biodiversity Festival** - is a series of event to celebrate the biodiversity on farm run by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. More information [here](#).

**Coming soon** - a new section on our website Events Calendar. This will have all our events up on it as well as those our Ambassadors are involved in, or other related organisations and groups. If you have relevant event coming up, please get in contact with us on [lucy@farmingfornature.ie](mailto:lucy@farmingfornature.ie) and we will put it up and share.

## 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 platfrom. Hosted by the charity Burrenbeo Trust and funded by

NPWS, DAFM and An Bord Bia

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

