



## Welcome to the Spring Farming For Nature Newsletter

Welcome to our first quarterly newsletter of 2024 which issues as we celebrate Lá Fhéile Bríde, with its resonances of the Celtic Imbolc festival of fertility, ushering in the season of Spring as a wild winter retreats. The first roses (prima rosas, primroses) are already popping out, as are the buttercup-like celandines and the catkins on alder and hazel.

It's a time of renewal here at Farming for Nature also as we bade farewell to our amazing colleague Lucy Bowler – off on her travels – and hopefully bid a warm welcome to our new recruits (we will introduce them when finalised). We would like to sincerely thank all of those who applied for this post, an outstanding array of talent indeed, and wish you all well while thanking you for your interest in FFN.

In other news, we are delighted to have received so many strong nominations for our 2024 Ambassador awards. Every nominee has an amazing story to share – indeed, we

look forward to sharing them – and they are all winners in our eyes and in the eyes of their nominators. Nonetheless, we must face the difficult task of narrowing these down to 12 Ambassadorships for 2024 – joining our existing network of 91 Ambassadors. We also welcomed 6 new Northern Irish Ambassadors at a wonderful event in late November organised by our friends at [www.nffn.org.uk](http://www.nffn.org.uk)– check out their films [here](#).

We were delighted to hear FFNA Bruce Thompson on Countrywide recently offering inspiration to fellow dairy farmers who want to do their bit for nature and have it acknowledged. Likewise, the Auchmuty family who featured in the Irish Farmers Journal, offering a lesson in resilience and positivity at a challenging time for the tillage sector. We are continuing with our ongoing Ambassador podcasts, webinars and planned farm walks which were such a success last year, so there are lots of ways you can connect with us. Not forgetting our on-line forum where you can post your queries and get some advice from fellow farmers.

We wish all our readers all the best for the coming season – it's a busy one but hopefully a very positive one, one that will augur well for the farming year ahead.

## **Meet our Ambassadors this Spring**

### **Blátnaid Gallagher, sheep farmer, Co. Galway**

Blátnaid Gallagher and her husband Niall manage a diverse farm with a range of different habitats such as woodland, permanent pasture, bogland and rewilded land. Blátnaid runs a small flock of pedigree Galway ewes, producing organic lamb and Galway wool. The farm is very extensively managed, with no chemicals used and external inputs are extremely low. Geese, ponies and donkeys are also kept on the farm. Much of the land is left for biodiversity and wildlife, including 6ha of bogland which is now a dedicated butterfly sanctuary, providing a habitat for the rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly as well as numerous other insects and birds. Mature hedgerows, woodland and nature corridors throughout the land provide habitat for the healthy populations of birds on the farm, as well as badgers, hares, pine marten and foxes. More information on Blátnaid's farm [here](#).

**Sign up for Blathnaid's online Q&A on the Growing Biofibre on the 13th February at 8pm [here](#).**

## **David Kerr, dairy farmer, Co Laois**

David Kerr is a commercial dairy farmer from Ballyfin Co Laois. He milks 150 cross-bred cows, “following the old farming mantra of one cow to the acre”. He also keeps a small flock of Dorset Horn sheep on the farm. 20% of the land has been reseeded with multispecies swards and clover and this has helped reduce the amount of artificial nitrogen spread on the land. There is 3 acres of woodland on the farm, mainly oak, which was planted by Davids late father George. To honour the passing of George in 2021, David devoted an area of land to a 1.5 acre wildlife pond on the farm. David has left approximately 12% of his farm as non-commercially productive land and he values this land for its biodiversity and wildlife value. More information on David’s farm [here](#).

**Sign up for David's online Q&A on running an intensive dairy farm around nature on the 12th March at 8pm [here](#).**

## **Diana Pickersgill, mixed stock farmer, Co. Westmeath**

Diana Pickersgill runs a mixed organic farm with her daughters Penn and Nadia, near Mullingar Co. Westmeath. There is 40 acres of multispecies sward and about 8ha of mixed broadleaf woodland on the farm which is operated under a continuous cover forestry system. An advocate for the importance of maintaining diversity on farms, Diana keeps a variety of stock on the land but maintains low stocking numbers. They keep Dexter cattle, sheep, sows, donkeys and chickens. There is also a kitchen garden on the farm and oats are grown to supplement winter feed and provide straw for bedding. Habitats on the farm include woodlands, hedgerows, wetland areas with 2 ponds, and orchard, meadows and wildflower areas. More information on Diana’s farm [here](#).

Keep an eye on FFN’s social media platforms/website to access farm videos, podcasts and other educational resources featuring these latest Ambassadors.

Meet our Ambassador Network

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

Join us on the second Tuesday of every month when we chat to our more recent Ambassadors and you can ask your pressing questions. Next up are:

**13th February 2023 8pm** 'Growing Biofibre: Farming with Ireland's Native Sheep Breed' with Galway farmer Blatnaid Gallagher. Register on below link.

**12th March 2023 8pm** 'Running an intensive dairy farm with space for nature' with Laois farmer David Kerr. Register on below link.

Ask the Farmer Q&A

## The Horse's Mouth Mentorship Programme

The call for this mentorship programme will hopefully open again for applications in March. There are only 50 places so make sure if you are interested in this to get your application in when it opens. If you wish to be emailed when this programme opens just email Brigid on [info@farmingfornature.ie](mailto:info@farmingfornature.ie) and we will notify you when the application process is open.

The Horse's Mouth Mentorship programme

## The Hare's Corner

The Hare's Corner is a way to offer farmers the chance to enhance the natural capital of their own holdings by installing ponds, (Burren pine) woodlands and (Seedsavers) orchards through an initiative hosted by our parent organisation the Burrenbeo Trust. So far 43 substantial ponds have been built since 2022 with funding through The Hare's Corner project. Wildlife ponds on farms are one of quickest ways to invite nature to your farm.

If you would like to avail of this funding in the future - you have to start with being part of our Horse's Mouth programme (see section above). Interested parties to email us on [info@farmingfornature.ie](mailto:info@farmingfornature.ie) and we will let you know when the call for applications is open next year.

Meanwhile if you would like to build a pond on your land but not sure where to start. See below.

The Hare's Corner Projects

How to build a wildlife pond on your farm

## Planting a Whitethorn Hedge with Jim Cronin

Join us on this course to learn more about planting whitethorn hedges. This course this will cover:

- Sourcing the plants
- Assessing your site
- Soil fertility
- Weed control
- Planting and pruning
- Aftercare of the hedge

When: **Wednesday 7th of February 2024, 10 am to 3.30 pm**

Where: **Bridgetown, Killaloe, Co. Clare.**

Price: €80 (places limited to 20 people, 25% discount for farmers that have been on our Horse's Mouth mentorship programme or our Ambassadors)

Details:

On the day we will be planting a hedge so this will be very much a hands-on course. We will also look at and assess whitethorn hedges of various ages on Jim's farm. The whitethorn-dominated hedge is an integral part of the Irish landscape, biodiversity-rich at all times of the year and pleasing to the eye, but it also has various traditions attached to it.

About the tutor:

Jim Cronin has a 16-acre organic market garden farm in Co. Clare where he has been applying biological agriculture principles for the last 30 years while maintaining many of the traditional methods of farming.

LOCATION

Bridgetown, Killaloe, Co. Clare

[Book course](#)

## ***"Ten steps you can take to support nature on your land"***

This short video outlines ten steps that farmers can take to support nature on their land. These tips are based on practical ideas from Irish farmers as to how they have created or enhanced farmland habitats. Click below to view

['Ten steps you can take to support nature on your land' video](#)

## ***"Managing healthy grasslands on your farm"***

This recently launched educational video outlines how Kildare-based Farming for Nature Ambassador, Kim McCall, manages the grassland on his farm. This short engaging video focuses on the benefits that good grassland management can provide for the farm, the stock, the farmer/family and for nature.

['Managing healthy grasslands on your farm' video](#)

## **Nature's Calendar this Spring - observations & actions**

Looking for information on what wildlife to look out for and what practical actions you can take on your farm to help nature this Winter, see our nature's 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.

Our most recent ones are:

[How to make biochar](#) with Kim McCall, Kildare Beef Farmer

*My land's natural carrying capacity* with James Gilmartin, Mixed Stock Farmer,  
Leitrim

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

Farming For Nature Podcasts

## Forum

This is space for farmers and others 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.

Most recent queries include:

*Co grazing cattle and pigs*

*Preparing land for goats*

Forum

## Groundtips - advice from farmers for farmers

Groundtips 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 *Myco-farming* with tips from ambassador Thomas O Connor on why fungi is such an important component of your farm. Click below to find out more.



Myco-farming

## Events Calendar

This section of our website has all our events up on it as well as events 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 [info@farmingfornature.ie](mailto:info@farmingfornature.ie) and we will put it up and share.

Upcoming events include:

February 7 @ 10:00 am - 3:30 pm FFN: **Planting a Whitethorn Hedge** with Jim Cronin  
Bridgetown, Killaloe, Co. Clare

February 24 Hedgerows Ireland: **Introduction to Hedge Laying**. Monageer, Co.  
Wexford

More information on the below link...

Events Calendar

## 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 and

DAFM

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



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Farming for Nature

Farming for Nature, Glebe Road, Kinvara, Co. Galway, Kinvara,

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