Aoife Leader- Teagasc Researcher

Fostering biodiversity on our farms

Glanbia Ireland Goodness Grows Here

Glanbia Ireland is an ingredient solutions partner to some of the world's leading companies and brands. At the forefront of ingredient technology, we offer a range of solutions to match the ever-changing demands of the food and nutrition industry and its consumers. With quality dairy and grains sourced from 5,000 Irish family farms, combined with advanced market research and insights, our unique platform offers fully traceable and sustainably produced natural solutions to help our customers stay ahead of the curve.

Habitats such as hedges, watercourses and field margins are features that define the Irish agricultural landscape and boost the biodiversity and sustainability of our farms.

Adopting simple and effective practices on farms can greatly improve the management of biodiversity and sustainability.

To help improve and foster more sustainable practices, Glanbia Ireland along with a select few suppliers are undertaking a research project which aims to achieve 7-10% biodiversity on their dairy farms. Glanbia Ireland as part of their Open Source Future Farm programme will be working in partnership with Teagasc - the Irish state agency who provide research, advisory and education in agriculture, horticulture, food and rural development.

Teagasc reseacher Aoife Leader who is a Walsh scholar completing a Masters in Agricultural Innovation Support, is working with our farmers to:

- Establish a baseline indication of biodiversity management practices.
- Develop a unique farm Biodiversity Management Plan for each farm that can be integrated into the whole farm plan
- Monitor/evaluate how this process works to provide lessons on better communication of biodiversity management advice.

Aoife explained the research involves piloting a new approach that communicates and integrates biodiversity management practices into whole-farm planning to bring about positive changes in practices on farm.

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Overview of the research project

Establishing a baseline:

The first phase of the study aims to establish baseline data of the biodiversity features and management practices currently in place on the farms. To do this, on-farm biodiversity features such as hedgerows, stonewalls, watercourses, tree groves, farmyards, forts, ponds, and other habitats have been mapped using mapping software and with input of each farmer.

The habitats from these maps will be combined to provide a "% Biodiversity on the Farming Platform" figure for each farm. There are 4 broad characteristics associated with intensive dairy farms which have an impact on biodiversity and provide a valuable network of corridors for wildlife:

- Farmed landscape structure
- Hedgerows
- Field margins
- Watercourses

The Teagasc tool; Biodiversity Management Practices Index (BMPI) has been used to establish current practices in these 4 areas. This tool will provide an indicator called "Average Field Size". This indicator will identify the extent to which farms are currently meeting the 4 characteristics associated with biodiversity (above).

Biodiversity Management Planning:

Once the baseline data is established, key information will be used to create a tailored biodiversity management plan for each farm. This will be done in collaboration with the participating farmers on an individual basis.

A Biodiversity Management Planning Tool, which has been developed especially for the purposes of the study will be used in this planning phase. This sets out the baseline data along with the biodiversity targets and actions to be taken to achieve an improvement. This will be a useful reference point for farmers as they strive for sustainability on their farms.

Plan Implementation:

The adoption of biodiversity management practices will be supported using various communication methods. This information and experience sharing platform will support the implementation of each individual plan.

Measurement of Change:

Improved biodiversity will be achieved where native hedgerows are planted, field and watercourse margins are widened and other habitats are enhanced or created. These changes will be measured and evaluated using the Teagasc tools. Positive changes to biodiversity will show as an increase in % Biodiversity on the Farming Platform or as a reduction to Average Field Size.

Change will also be seen where there has been positive adoption of farming practices. This could be the implementation of best practice hedgerow maintenance or rotational hedge cutting, where watercourse management is enhanced or where cultivation and spraying practices within field margins are improved. Changes such as these will be measured to establish the effectiveness of the communication methods employed.

Working together to improve dairy farming sustainability:

The selected farmers will be involved in all phases of this study which proposes a practical and inclusive approach whereby biodiversity is recognised as an important aspect of dairy farm sustainability.

Our milk suppliers are proud custodians of their natural environment and by protecting and improving their already high standards of biodiversity it will help us meet key environmental challenges. This initiative along with many others are all helping to provide a healthier future for our company, our employees, our communities our farmers and our customers.

Goodness Grows Here!

Our unique dairy system

Grass fed cows
Outdoor grazing on nutritious grass for most of the year

Cleanest air in Europe
Urban outdoor air pollution index

Island location
On the edge of the Atlantic Ocean with plentiful rain

Product quality
Multiple checkpoints from farm to factory

Food authenticity
Produced honestly by safe family farms

Clean label
Non-GMO, hormone-free, Kosher & Halal

Cow & milk traceability
From grassland to customer

Trusted partner
Supporting leading global brands

Get in Touch

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