WHERE TO NOW FOR IRISH FARMING?

Patrick McDermott

So the truth has hit us in the face at last like a shower of dung from a dung spreader. Back in 1973, when we joined the common market and I was soon afterwards catching 'ram' lambs all over the Black Mountain to get 50p per head on them, I thought all my Christmases had come together. I have the word ram in inverted commas because I think they had to be male, though I'm not sure. Nobody could believe that you'd get paid for simply having them. There might be no sale for them on the 12th August or the 12th September, the two principal fair days for sheep in Manorhamilton or they might get lost in the meantime, but you at least had your 50p in your pocket. What benevolence! The 'lost' ones might even turn up the following year and be presented as hoggets for the hogget 'bounty' as we called it; though this time they had to be female to qualify. But if you did get a good 'ringed' job on them, caught them quickly, created plenty of confusion, struggled desperately with them and rushed them through, you might pass them off as female and get your 'bounty' which, if I remember correctly, could have been £2, a hell of a lot of money then. The important thing in all this exercise was to get them away quickly so that they wouldn't have time to urinate and give away the game. A good boot up behind helped here.

Frank O' Neill, Drumgrania, pondering on the future of Irish farming.

Soon, sheep were to be seen everywhere–in hedges and ditches, shoughs and ravines, reaching up for any bit of foliage that could appease their ravenous appetite–no wonder the hills were laid bare. We were told that there was unlimited potential for sheep meat (mutton) in Europe and we would be millionaires in no time.

Today, Europe is still not self-sufficient in mutton but the so-called bonanza has come to an end and we are not millionaires. An animal called WTO has changed all that. WTO stands for Work Trade Organisation. Imagine the change in 30 years. It's all about globalisation now. At the WTO meeting in Cancun in Mexico earlier this year, the poorer nations were up in arms about subsidies as we have them in Europe and America. They want us to get rid of them. One farmer even stabbed himself to death to highlight the plight of farmers in poorer countries.

So where does that leave all our farmers here in Ireland? We have the name of having 140,000 farmers still. The minister, Joe Walsh thinks they are a shower of cribbers. The fact that the average farm wage is less than half the average industrial wage doesn't bother him or that 60% of farmers make an average wage of about 5,000 Euro a year. Yet, we are being told there is still a place for the 'efficient' farmer even though the so-called efficient farmers that are around now in the dairying for example, will lose 10,000-15,000 Euro this year. Is it a case of leading the fool on ? And don't forget there are still fools out there who will continue to work longer and longer hours just because they don't want to accept the reality staring them in the face, that no matter how 'efficient' they are, the unit of labour to produce a Euro in farming is colossal when compared to the unit that some industrial worker might have to produce to earn the minimum wage.

Fanatical farmers are being hauled out to show how it can be done but this is all a sham. They are not making the money. The primary producer is getting a pittance but yet he cannot be convinced to withhold his produce from market to force up the price of his produce. It's worth a try, or at least, it was worth a try when we weren't flooded with imported and untraceable food from Brazil and Argentina. It probably wouldn't work now. What a pity! Of course, all primary producers do badly relative to wholesalers and retailers unless they have either huge markets or monopoly position or ideally both. The consumer doesn't benefit but the primary producer is often wrongly blamed for this. The primary producer gets caught with all his produce if he can't sell but the in-betweens only get caught with one consignment. So, only a fool is a primary producer if he can be a wholesaler or retailer.

The affection and attachment of the farmer to the land is a great problem. And this is very understandable. Weren't we all farmers at one stage and land is scarce. This is the sad part of it.

Of course, in the future, under a decoupled system, there will inevitably be periods of scarcity but this will almost certainly be filled by the so-called poorer countries if they can improve their

LIFE IN LEITRIM

Some Young Peoples' Comments

Rosaleen Kielty

1 Patrick McKenna 21 *Drumshanbo, Young musician and freelance journalist.*
I always feel settled relaxed and look forward to spending time around home. Things that are important to me are music, sport and family. As a young musician I feel disadvantaged through lack of place to practice, lack of venues and smaller audiences.

2 Anna Marie O'Rourke 26. *Carrick-on-Shannon Craft Development Officer, Leitrim County Enterprise Board.*
I appreciate very much the vibrant Arts scene emerging in the county and I also appreciate the scenery and landscape which makes it a wonderful place to live. The landscape also acts as an inspiration to the artists and craftspeople.

Being able to drive is an essential part of life in Leitrim. Land prices still remain relatively cheap and it is still possible to find a reasonable priced site to build a house.

3 Jerome McGirl 31 *Drumreilly, Key worker in the North Western Health Board.*
The quality of life available in Leitrim means a lot to me. I am impressed by the comprehensive cross section of leisure activities e.g. water sports GAA, Fishing equestrian and the arts.

I hope to see the county continue to develop in a sensitive manner, careful to maintain old traditions yet moving forward to embrace modern developments and creating employment opportunities.

4 Geraldine Mulligan, *Drumreilly, Optometrist.*
Having studied in England for four years I now really appreciate being able to return home to live. Finding employment matching my qualifications near home has been brilliant. I now feel I will be able to renew my involvement in local community activities. The distance from cinema, art galleries and large shops is a disadvantage.

5 Moira O'Connor, *Manorhamilton.*
Moira is post woman, member of the FCA and Local Fire Brigade. She is also a mother and wife.
Through her work she enjoys meeting people from every sector of the community. There is a good social life and good facilities for children. However, she recognizes the huge ongoing need for volunteers to commit to being involved in community activities especially for the young people.

6 Tara O'Donnell *Student. Drumkeerin.*
Tara is a student in Lough Allen College and she is really looking forward to the opportunity of travelling away to study in university. She feels there is not enough leisure facilities for young people e.g. sports complex, gym facilities and swimming pool.

7 Aine Bohan 16 *Student Drumkeerin.*
Aine is also a student in Lough Allen College. She feels the price of car insurance is very high for young people. Cars are her passion and she is looking forward to getting her driving license.

She feels older people do not always understand the young people and their problems.

8 Marie Keaney 22, *Kiltyclogher,* Trainer of underage girl's football team which she really enjoys and it gives her an opportunity to meet and socialize with new people. She is also secretary of Kiltyclogher Community Council. It is very important that support is given to help job creation in areas like Kiltyclogher.

9 Carmel & Helena O'Rourke,
It has been a wonderful opportunity to identify and successfully develop a florist business in Drumshanbo. In the last number of years we know many young people who have returned to live in their native place and either become self employed or work in the many new companies providing employment opportunities.

10 Lee Guckian, *Leitrim Village. Surfing instructor and craft worker.*
He wants to live beside the sea where he can surf and also do some craft work. He produces a lovely range of custom made mirrors.

11 Sophie & Brian Reynolds. Wet, Cold & Windy, but class. Sophie said it was a brilliant experience canoeing out to the island, but we were cold, wet and hungry.

clout. The world price for milk is close to half the Irish price, so in the long term, there can hardly be any hope for the Irish dairy farmer who at the moment is our highest earner. So, people who say otherwise are knowingly speaking out of both sides of their mouths at the same time.

No Minister for Agriculture will say openly that the end of Irish agriculture is in sight, although Teagasc forecasts that 45,000 will be forced out of farming in the next ten years. That is why the Minister's talking about the farmers 'droning on' is insulting.

It would appear that the law of comparative advantage is going to come into play. If there are herds of 250,000 sucklers in Australia and New Zealand, isn't that where our beef should come from? From a global point of view, it would not make sense for us to be trying to compete. Sad, but global sense and perhaps part of the evolutionary process. And that is the way it's going to be and let those who think otherwise hump off.

To have to swallow all that line of thinking has to be galling for Irish farmers, some of whom went through the Economic War and had to rely on the Anglo-Irish treaty with England, who always had a cheap food policy and then thought things would change for the good and for ever in the European Union. Now they see everything they ever fought for, like a reasonable standard of living in a rural area, about to disappear forever.

Of course, there is no point in producing food if there is no one to buy it and eat it. So what is going to happen to the land in Ireland? For one thing, there is forestry–the most suitable land in Europe for it, we are told. We have to go nearly 20% more to reach the European average. So there is some scope there. What else? Well, there is shooting, hunting (which most likely wouldn't be allowed) and hill walking.

So the truth of our situation has now hit us in the face as unpleasantly and disgustingly as a shower of dung from a dung spreader–there is no future no matter how efficient you are and nobody seems to care least of all, the Minister who claims you can make a good living from eighty acres–some chance.

Ivan McPhillips, project lecturer in Enterprise Development GMIT pictured with Conan Clarke at the Enterprise Ireland Third Level Awards held at the Corrib Great Southern Hotel in Galway

YOUNG PIONEERING STUDENT

A young pioneering Gortletteragh student, Conan Clarke, and four fellow business studies colleagues from GMIT Galway were selected as runners up in the prestigious Enterprise Ireland National Third Level Awards held earlier this year. The group entered a Combi-Gun as their concept which is a multi-purpose dosing gun for sheep farmers. The unique product features a brand applicator for worm dosing, a mechanism to identify sheep dosed, a throat protector and a sheep counting system.

The students were awarded for their innovative concept and foresight. This one person operated Combi-Gun offers a labour cost saving device. The team consisted of Conan, Brian Gillespie from Clare, Noel Judge, Liam McGuinness and David Corcoran, all from Galway.

CHURCH ISLAND

Church Island, on Lough Gill, was the Chief seat of the O'Cuirnins, ancestors of Kathleen O'Cuirnin, The Wild Rose of Lough Gill. The O'Cuirnins were the hereditary poets and bards to the Brefney Chieftaincies, of O'Rourke and O'Reilly. Some most notable members were Thomas O'Cuirnin, Ollamh of the men of Brefney who died in 1400, Cormac O'Cuirnin, Chief Professor of Literature for Ireland who died in 1475. Another O'Cuimin, who was Chief Poet to O'Rourke and O'Reilly, died in 1498.

Tragically the Church of Inishmore on Lough Gill was burned in 1416. Many valuable manuscripts were destroyed. Today, during the summer season, there are regular daily boat trips around Lough Gill taking in Church Island. During the boat trip the vessel's Captain and tour guide George McGoldrick relates the area's history through poetry, song and recitation. Mass is celebrated every year on Church Island.

6th Century Chur on Church Island Photo: Declan Curneen

Michael Gill from Drumsna, Pat Hartigan & John Cronin

John McGrath, Tyler Smith, Rena Mayman & Mike Harrison

COUNTY LEITRIM SOCIETY OF BOSTON

6th Annual Golf Tournament

Held August 3rd at Newton Commonwealth Golf Course, Newton, reception and presentation of prizes held afterwards at Nichols Street Bar & Restaurant, Watertown.

Jim Gallagher & Tom Gallagher from Aughnasheelin, Phil Maguire & Cyril Kavanagh.

Denis McGloin, Francis Kelly & Brendan Gallagher from Kiltyclogher

Joe Clancy, Glenfarne, Joe Clancy jnr and team

John Hartigan, P.J Hartigan, Frank Hartigan from Drumsna & Dan Harrington

Special Olympics
Manorhamilton
Collage: James Molloy

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MANORHAMILTON WELCOMES
THE GAMBIA
Cora D
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R280
Droim
DRUMS
THE GAMBI
Cluainin
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Good Luck
Good Luck
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