

Farmer Newsletter

Summer 2025

Sustainable Quality Assurance Scheme members' communication

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BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD



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Korean buyers pictured at event to launch Irish beef in Seoul last September.



Asia Trade Mission

Bord Bia and Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon led a trade mission to Japan and South Korea in early June to strengthen Ireland's agri-food exports. The trade mission included meetings between Korean and Japanese buyers and Irish exporters. Dairy is the top export to both markets with cheese dominating dairy exports to Japan. Japan is an important market for Irish beef tongue, while prime beef cuts are served in some high-end restaurants and hotels. Ireland gained beef access to South Korea late last year and several exporters are now supplying the market.



Young Sheep Farmer Forum participants, Tom Larkin, Nicola Kennedy, and Rachel McCormack, with Brian Tormey, Kepak, Minister Martin Heydon T.D and Shauna Jager, Bord Bia.

Kepak Young Sheep Farmer Forum

Bord Bia is a proud partner of Kepak's new Young Sheep Farmer Forum, developed in conjunction with Mounbellew Agricultural College. This initiative aims to make sheep farming more attractive for young people by promoting sustainable and profitable practices. Fifteen young sheep farmers and students will take part in workshops, farm visits, and meet global customers of Irish lamb, through a visit to Rungis wholesale market in France. At the end of the programme, participants will submit practical policy recommendations to ensure that young farmers have a voice in the direction of the sector.

Showcasing organic beef and lamb

Bord Bia recently hosted several groups of journalists, influencers, and trade professionals from Austria, Germany, and Sweden, as part of a Bord Bia run organic beef and lamb campaign. The groups visited organic beef and sheep farms to see Irish organic farming up close. The campaign, which is co-funded by the EU, is investing €2.7 million over three years to raise awareness of the positive attributes of certified organic beef and lamb across four key EU countries.

Stay safe in the sun

Bord Bia, in partnership with the HSE and Healthy Ireland, is running a campaign to raise awareness among Irish farmers of the importance of being safe in the sun.

Bord Bia auditors will distribute SunSmart for Farmers leaflets to all beef, dairy, and sheep farmers during their Bord Bia audit this summer. With approximately 780 farms visited weekly by Bord Bia auditors, the campaign will reach over 12,000 farmers during the peak UV exposure season.

Eoghan Geraghty, Agricultural Sustainability Co-ordinator with Bord Bia commented: "Over the summer months, Bord Bia auditors will encourage farmers to take and read the SunSmart for Farmers leaflet. Through this simple step, we hope to prompt farmers to better protect their skin from the sun every day, whether out in the field, inside the tractor cab, or on a cloudy day."

This campaign forms part of the HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) and Healthy Ireland's SunSmart campaign, encouraging people across Ireland to enjoy the sun safely and reduce their risk of skin cancer.

Skin cancer facts:

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland with over

11,000

cases annually - many of which are preventable.

Farmers receive **2-3 times** more UV radiation than those working indoors.

Eoghan Geraghty, Bord Bia; Ross Crowe, farm manager; Ann-Marie Lawlor, HSE; David Hayes, Bord Bia auditor. Pictured on the farm of Patsy and Susan Ahern, Ballyduff, Co. Waterford.



HSE Advice



Slip on clothing that covers your skin

Wear long-sleeved tops and collared t-shirts to protect exposed skin.



Slap on sunscreen

Use broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30+ for adults, 50+ for children) with high UVA protection. Apply 20 minutes before going outside and reapply every two hours or more often if sweating.



Slap on a hat

Wear a wide-brimmed hat to protect your face, ears, and neck.



Seek shade

If you can, stay out of direct sun between 11am and 3pm. Plan outdoor work for early morning or late afternoon. Use trees or portable shade for breaks and meals.



Slide on sunglasses

Protect your eyes from UV rays with close-fitting, wraparound sunglasses.

Cattle forecast

- Throughput to date is 2,000 head above the same period in 2024, though availability has tightened recently.
- Strong beef prices have led to younger, lighter cattle being processed earlier, delaying the anticipated drop in supply.
- Forecasts suggest a 5% overall decline in prime cattle supply for 2025.

Initial Bord Bia projections indicated that overall cattle throughput in Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) approved processing plants will reduce by 70-90,000 head this year. This kill forecast incorporates the latest available AIMS figures, which outline the inventory of cattle numbers by age categories, as well as considering ongoing developments in the live trade.

Total cattle throughput during 2025 to date is currently trending 2,000 head higher than the corresponding period last year with

availability for processing tightening significantly in the last few weeks. Feedback from the market is indicating that prime cattle have been processed younger and lighter than anticipated in the first five months of 2025, a trend driven by strong deadweight beef prices. As a result, the reduction in cattle supplies is expected to be pushed out to later in the year. Projections have indicated an overall 5% decline in the supply of prime cattle for the year and considering current supply levels, this could indicate a 7-8% decline in supplies for the second half of the year.

Live cattle exports

- **247,000 head exported, up +16% (34,000) year-on-year.**
- **Calf exports rose by 13% to 188,000 head, and older cattle exports jumped 25% to 59,000 head.**
- **Higher live exports of older cattle may reduce weanling availability in autumn.**

During the first five months of 2025 there have been **247,000 live cattle traded with customers outside Ireland. This is an increase of just over 34,000 head (+16%) from the corresponding period in 2024.**

Irish cattle have a very positive reputation with well-established customers in key export markets. Exporters consistently receive positive feedback on the quality of the cattle delivered, their health credentials and their subsequent performance in market.

Declining cattle herds across Europe and reduced productivity as a result of disease issues (bluetongue) have also been key factors behind the increased demand for Irish cattle from both established and new customers in key export markets. The number of calves traded is up 13% on the same period last year to 188,000 head, while exports of older cattle have increased by almost 25% to total 59,000 head. This increase in the exports of older cattle may impact weanling availability in the autumn and also contribute to tighter supplies of cattle for processing.



Sheep market update

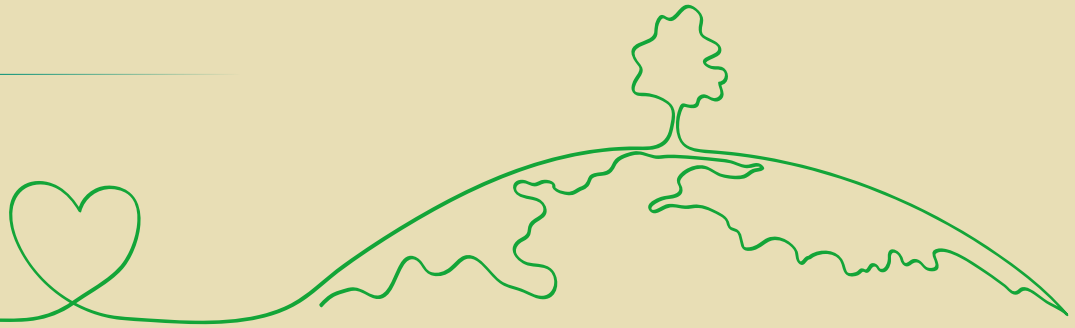
- **Hogget prices under pressure, especially for overweight carcasses.**
- **Spring lamb numbers are increasing weekly, driven by favourable weather and strong flock performance.**
- **Throughput remains down: cumulative sheep kill is 160,000 head lower than 2024.**
- **European lamb production is falling, which may stabilise Irish prices, but Southern Hemisphere lamb remains highly competitive due to lower base prices.**

Deadweight prices for hoggets have continued to come under pressure in recent weeks with the major lamb processors imposing significant price penalties for overweight carcasses. Some reports have indicated that there are still significant numbers of hoggets in the system for processing however the proportion of spring lambs in the kill is increasing weekly. Favourable weather conditions this spring and early summer are contributing to strong levels of lamb performance and reducing slaughter ages in early lambing flocks.

The Muslim festival Eid al-Adha festival ran from 6th-10th June 2025 and traditionally there is an increase in throughput numbers ahead of these religious festivals to coincide with increased demand for product from our key export markets.

Sheep throughput numbers continue to trend below 2024 levels with the cumulative kill running 160,000 head lower than last year. A reduced lamb crop in 2024 due to a combination of lower ewe numbers and challenging production conditions impacted overall lamb production and thus hogget carryover into 2025. In addition a reduction in the movement of sheep from Northern Ireland for direct slaughter has also played a role in the reduced availability.

The latest sheep census figures for December 2024 have indicated a further contraction in the breeding flock however the favourable weather conditions will have increased lamb survival rates and may well offset any further decline in production this year. Further declines in lamb production levels are forecast across Europe this year and should help provide some stability for Irish lamb in key export markets. It should be noted however that low deadweight prices in the Southern Hemisphere make their product very competitive in a high price European market, even when transport and associated costs are factored in.



AgNav: A free tool to improve your farm's sustainability

AgNav is a free and easy-to-use technology for Irish farmers, tailored to the unique needs of every farm. AgNav provides reliable, science-based insights to drive both environmental improvements and economic performance.

AgNav is designed to help farmers reduce on-farm emissions by allowing them to visualise how modifying aspects of their management might change their farm's emissions. They can then use AgNav to develop farm-specific sustainability action plans.

Developed through a partnership between Bord Bia, Teagasc, and ICBF, AgNav combines the expertise and data of all three agencies to support delivery on Ireland's Climate Action Plan targets.

How does it work?

Assess

AgNav shows an assessment of current farm performance using data from Bord Bia, ICBF, Teagasc, and farmer-completed surveys.

Animal and production data from ICBF and Bord Bia audit data are automatically entered into AgNav, which removes the need for farmers to do it themselves. Scientific models developed by Teagasc use this data to calculate the individual farm's performance under key sustainability metrics:

- Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Ammonia emissions
- Production Nutrient balance

If a farmer chooses to complete an AgNav-hosted survey on their farm's soils, then AgNav will calculate how much carbon is captured in their soil and will adjust the farm's GHG emissions accordingly.

Analyse

The AgNav Forecaster is a core feature of the AgNav platform. Farmers, or their advisors, can use the forecaster to analyse how changes in farming practices and management can impact each sustainability metric.

Act

Based on the forecaster analysis, farmers can identify which actions are most appropriate for their farm allowing them to create a personalised farm sustainability action plan.

Farmers can choose actions to address water quality, gaseous farm emissions, and biodiversity.



Water quality actions could include soil sampling and testing, using protected urea, improved fertiliser spreading practices, or stopping animals having access to waterways.



Actions to reduce farm emissions could include using low emission slurry spreading, using protected urea, and applying lime, phosphorus and potassium, which helps to improve soil fertility and nutrient use, reducing the need for chemical fertilisers.



Actions to improve biodiversity could include enhancing hedgerows by allowing at least one whitethorn in each hedgerow to mature into a flowering tree.

As of May 2025, 9,339 farm sustainability action plans have been created on AgNav, averaging three to four actions per plan. The most common actions selected are:

- Using protected urea
- Applying lime to correct soil pH
- Applying phosphorus and potassium
- Low emission slurry spreading

Other frequent actions include incorporating clover, reducing chemical nitrogen usage, and spreading slurry at the most effective times.

Next steps:

Currently, dairy and beef farmers can access AgNav by signing up for the free Teagasc Signpost Advisory Programme or through an affiliated processor programme. AgNav Tillage launched on 25th June and, later this summer, tillage farmers will be able to sign up directly via the AgNav website.

Currently assessed	In-development
Greenhouse Gases	Economic impact
Ammonia	Biodiversity
Production	
Nutrient Balance	
Soil Carbon	
Farming enterprises	In-development
Beef	Sheep
Dairy	Pigs
NEW: Tillage	Poultry - layers and broilers
	Horticulture
	Forestry

Bord Bia audit

Practical updates, built around real Irish farms

Irish farmers are rightly proud of the high standards they work to every day. But as farming practices evolve and international market demands change, our standards need to keep pace. Because of this, Bord Bia is updating the standards for the beef, lamb, dairy, horticulture, egg, poultry, and pigmeat schemes.

The draft new criteria aim to better reflect what's happening on Irish farms today, support access to key export markets, and help ensure Irish produce remains competitive on the world stage. The proposed updates also aim to make audits more streamlined and practical for farmers.

Why are these updates happening?

There are a few reasons why we need to update the standards and therefore make some changes to the audit.

- To reflect current legislation and farming practices.
- To meet the needs of trade buyers by verifying the strengths of Irish farming.
- To protect Ireland's positive, hard-earned reputation as a food producer.
- To keep up with global competitors.

Who's involved?

Draft new criteria have been developed in conjunction with Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) made up of:

- Representatives from leading farm organisations.
- Representatives from industry, research and regulatory organisations.

These committees have worked to ensure the draft new criteria reflect real farming practice and help to improve the audit process (see below).

Pilot audits - giving farmers their say

Pilot audits of the draft new criteria for all on-farm schemes (beef, lamb, dairy, horticulture, egg, poultry, and pig) will take place on nominated farms this summer. These farms were nominated through the TACs and agreed to take part. By testing the draft criteria in real farm settings, it allows farmers to provide practical feedback on how the draft criteria work on the ground. This feedback will be reviewed by the TACs to help refine and finalise the updated standard.

New audit process: less repetition, more focus

Under the new proposals, not all criteria will be assessed during every audit. This marks a significant change from current practice, where all requirements are reviewed at each renewal audit. Instead, areas that were previously compliant will carry through to the next audit and will only be rescored if there is evidence of non-compliance.

The proposed new audit process:

During the introductory phase, each current member will have a 'transition' audit. This will focus on the new and updated criteria, as well as reviewing any non-compliances raised in their last two audits.



After completing the first audit under the new standard, each subsequent audit will focus on one of three key areas of the standard. This means that each audit will cover only the criteria relevant to that focus area—approximately one-third of the total criteria.



Each audit will place a strong emphasis on the farm walk, where compliance is assessed through visual checks and conversations with the farmer.



Records will remain an important part in compliance, but auditors will sample the records, rather than review them all in full.



Nothing is changing just yet

Much of the criteria remain the same, with some new criteria that are required by legislation but weren't previously audited. Other draft criteria reflect best practices in areas like environmental actions and animal health and welfare. The final version of the criteria won't be confirmed until pilot audits are completed and reviewed. When the time comes, you'll get plenty of notice and clear guidance so you can prepare for your next audit.

For more information visit

www.bordbia.ie/farmers-growers
or
farm.bordbia.ie

Laura Crowley with chef Dennis Kuipers and Kevin Kelly (former Irish Ambassador to the Netherlands).

Meet Bord Bia Global Laura Crowley - Netherlands

What is your role within Bord Bia?

I head up our Dutch team of five. The Netherlands is Ireland's third largest export market, so maintaining our good reputation, as well as active engagement with everyone from retailers to scientists, butchers to journalists and opinion leaders are my priorities.

I also wear a second hat overseeing the Chefs' Irish Beef Club (CIBC) programme across nine priority regions around the world. The club is an exclusive network of top chefs who promote and support Irish beef.

What are the main Irish food and drink exports to the Netherlands?

Irish beef is stocked in two-thirds of all Dutch retailers and is Ireland's third-largest export market for beef, making it more visible to consumers than in many other markets.

The Netherlands is Ireland's second-largest export market for dairy. However, it is more difficult to see on shelves or menus, as it is often traded on to third countries or further processed here (for example, into baby food). The Netherlands is also a priority market for some Irish food and drink brands. Surprising customers by telling them that the baked goods in a meeting are produced in Ireland never gets old!

What role does sustainability and Quality Assurance play in marketing Irish beef and dairy in the Netherlands?

The Netherlands is a global leader in sustainability, and places high demands on its imports as a result. Animal welfare, too, remains a particularly important area of interest for local NGOs.

Although not usually visible on pack, Dutch retailers insist on Quality Assurance as a prerequisite for supplying the market. The Quality Assurance scheme provides the data that informs all Irish beef marketing campaigns, which are - particularly in this market - under constant scrutiny. High-quality data is no longer a nice-to-have, but a requirement, and the data provided through Origin Green is ensuring that we retain our licence to operate in the market.

How do consumer preferences and trends in your region influence the demand for Irish beef?

According to Bord Bia's recent survey of Dutch grocery shoppers, Irish beef is the favoured source of imported beef, second only to domestic beef. The Dutch have a great tradition of stewing, which Irish grass-fed forequarter cuts cater to well. We time campaigns to coincide with the increased availability of forequarter cuts in the autumn/early winter and the increased desire to stew as the days shorten. It is important to note, however, that the Dutch government encourages individuals to reduce their beef consumption in favour of plant-based proteins to reduce their environmental impact.