

FOCUS FARM WALK

Celebrating the diversity of IHFA member herds



Welcome

Welcome to the IHFA Focus Farm Open Day 2026

The IHFA Focus Farm Programme provides a unique opportunity to visit some of Ireland's leading dairy farms, see different farming systems in action, and take away practical ideas that may benefit your own herd and business. It demonstrates how pedigree Holstein Friesian cows are key to the success of many different systems.



Irish dairy farming continues to be built around spring-calving, grass-based production systems, but no two farms are exactly the same. Each farm operates within its own set of circumstances, resources, labour requirements and business objectives. Likewise, the Holstein Friesian breed offers tremendous versatility, with the ability to deliver cows that can thrive across a wide range of systems, from high-output operations to lower-input, grass-focused enterprises.

The purpose of the Focus Farm Programme is to showcase this diversity and demonstrate how successful farmers are breeding and managing cows that are well suited to their individual farming goals. Throughout 2026, IHFA has featured a selection of outstanding member herds from across the country. These herds were chosen based on their achievements in areas such as milk production, fertility, classification, longevity and overall profitability.

What today's event highlights is that there is no single blueprint for success. Profitable and sustainable dairy farming comes from aligning breeding and management decisions with the circumstances of each individual farm. The pedigree Holstein Friesian cow provides the flexibility to achieve this, offering farmers the opportunity to selectively breed animals that meet their own performance, efficiency and sustainability targets.

IHFA remains committed to supporting our members through a comprehensive range of services including pedigree registration, herd grade-up programmes, classification, advertising and marketing services, sale catalogues and much more. Our team is available throughout the day and would be delighted to assist with any questions you may have. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all of the Focus Farm families who have participated in the programme this year. Their willingness to share information, host visitors and openly discuss both the opportunities and challenges of modern dairy farming has made this initiative a tremendous success. A special word of thanks to today's host family for opening their farm and welcoming us here.

We hope you enjoy the day, gain valuable insights from your fellow farmers, and leave with ideas that can help strengthen your own herd and business.

Laurence Feeney
Chief Executive, Irish Holstein Friesian Association

IHFA would like to sincerely thank the Focus Farmers and their families for their participation throughout the year.

Paddy & Michael Quealy, Grenan Herd, Co.Waterford
Brian, Hazel & Mark Gray, Watchorn Herd, Co.Kildare
Ronan Siochru, Dingle Herd, Co.Kerry
Shane, Gerard & Roseann McHugh, Knockmullen Herd, Co.Leitrim
Melvin & George Masterson, Boroside Herd, Co.Wexford
Denis O Leary, Clochrúa Herd, Co.Cork



Paddy & Michael Quealy - Grenan Herd

For four generations, the Quealy family has cultivated a reputation for strong breeding, disciplined management, and a commitment to high quality dairy production. Today, Paddy, Michael, and Michael's two sons carry this legacy forward, running a fully integrated dairy enterprise where every animal is reared on the farm. While more land was rented in previous decades, the holding is now almost entirely family owned, supplemented only by small parcels rented from neighbours. Silage work is handled by contractors, with additional labour brought in during the intensive spring period.

The farm's transition into pedigree breeding began in the early 2000s, with a formal breeding programme established in 2005. Before that, replacement cows were often purchased, but the family gradually shifted toward a closed, self-sustaining system built on AI and pedigree sires. Paddy's enthusiasm for cattle breeding and his experience working with the classifiers shaped much of the farm's progress, helping the herd grade up efficiently while improving animal health, fertility, and production traits.

Even before official pedigree status, the Quealys were breeding their own replacements from the early 1990s. Over time, the benefits of a closed herd became clear: improved disease control, greater uniformity, and better genetic direction. Today, pedigree bulls remain central to the strategy, and classification days are viewed as a valuable guide for long-term breeding decisions. Heifers are typically sold after calving, with a strong base of repeat buyers returning each year for reliable, wellbred stock.



PADDY & MICHAEL QUEALY - GRE NAN HERD - CO. WATERFORD



FARM PERFORMANCE

2025 - Milk Recording 305d			
Cows	209		
Calving Interval	373		
Milk Yield kgs	7113		
Fat kgs (%)	314 (4.42)		
Protein kgs (%)	249 (3.50)		
Total Solids kgs	563		
Conformation Av.	83.7		
Lifetime Value/day	€2.40		
Average Parity	4.06		
Herd EBI	Milk SI	Fert SI	Health SI
€57	€-43	€40	€10



NEED TO KNOW INFORMATION

- Compact spring calving: 210/221 cows calved Jan-March
- All calves reared: system fully integrated with dairy + beef
- Strong focus on classification & genetics for breeding decisions

HOW WE FARM

FEEDING

- System designed for practical efficiency within existing infrastructure, ensuring cows can be managed without pressure on facilities
- Feeding approach supports strong cow performance and fertility, helping maintain a compact calving pattern
- Integration with beef enterprise ensures efficient use of feed resources, with cull cows and non-performers redirected rather than carried

BREEDING

- Heavy use of AI for cows; stock bulls for heifers
- Strong focus on avoiding inbreeding: use 7 bulls each year
- Classification is the key driver of sire selection

MANAGEMENT

- Tight but manageable calving window reduces labour pressure
- Clear culling policy: empty cows, poor udder/legs, and older cows removed
- Classification day is a key tool for improving herd performance decisions

Brian, Hazel & Mark Grey - Watchorn Herd

Watchorn Farm is a name long woven into the agricultural fabric of its community. Established in 1937, when Hazel's grandfather first purchased the land and began milking cows, the farm has remained a proud family enterprise for nearly nine decades. Today, Brian and Hazel, together with Mark, continue that legacy-blending pedigree breeding, sustainable milk production, and an ambitious value-added dairy business.

Cows have been at the heart of Watchorn Farm from the beginning, and the current team runs the enterprise with the support of parttime labour, including UCO students and local workers. Silage and baling are fully outsourced to contractors. The farm has long embraced innovation: milk recording has been ongoing since 1984, and artificial insemination has guided breeding decisions since the early 1990s.

The next generation of diversification comes through Graze Dairy, the family's limited company operated by Mark and Kate. With an onsite coffee cabin, milk vending machines, and a selection of locally sourced foods, Graze Dairy connects farm and consumer in a direct and engaging way. Hazel joins Mark for the early morning work, with one fulltime and two parttime staff supporting retail operations. The farm returned to an 80:20 calving split in 2022 to strengthen the vending business, and 2026 marked an exciting new chapter with the launch of inhouse ice cream production. Three milk vending machines now serve the community-one on the farm and two placed in local shops-supported by a split calving system and a productive herd of 112 cows.



BRIAN, HAZEL & MARK GREY - WATCHORN HERD - CO.KILDARE



FARM PERFORMANCE

2025 - Milk Recording 305d

Cows	56
Calving Interval	381 days
Milk Yield kgs	6841
Fat kgs (%)	318 (4.65)
Protein kgs (%)	260 (3.80)
Total Solids kgs	578
Conformation Av.	79.9
Lifetime Value/day	€3.39
Average Parity	4.00

Herd EBI	Milk SI	Fert SI	Health SI
€152	€24	€71	€11



NEED TO KNOW INFORMATION

- Transitioning to a split-calving system to ensure year-round milk supply
- Producing ~7,000 L/cow with high fat (4.6%) and protein (3.6%)
- Diversified business with on-farm milk vending and ice cream

HOW WE FARM

FEEDING

- Strong emphasis on high-quality silage, with some fields specifically managed for baled silage production to ensure consistent forage quality
- Diet carefully controlled to maintain milk quality and flavour for direct sales
- Cows receive approximately 13 tonnes of concentrates per year, balanced alongside forage
- Winter diet: silage + meal + small amounts of maize, corn, and barley. Pre-calving: extra 1 kg rolled oats added to support transition cows
- Grazing season: grass-based diet with concentrates fed through the parlour

BREEDING

- AI-based system using proven sires
- Two rounds of AI followed by stock bull for clean-up
- Focus on improving conformation + maintaining milk performance

MANAGEMENT

- Heat detection system improves accuracy and reduces labour
- Annual pre-breeding scan to identify and treat problem cows
- Grass measured every 10 days to match supply with demand
- Ongoing reseedling (~15 acres/year) to maintain grass quality

Ronan Siochru - Dingle Herd

Since returning to the family farm at just 22 years old, Ronan has shaped the Dingle Herd into a high performance pedigree enterprise grounded in production, fertility, and functional type. Supported by casual labour during the busy calving period-often neighbours lending a hand-Ronan has steadily developed a herd that reflects both his practical experience and the knowledge gained through formal training and industry involvement.

After spending time in London, Ronan returned home and completed his Green Cert at Clonakilty Agricultural College from 2012 to 2014. He began milking in 2014 with 60 heifers, just 10 of which were pedigree. The differences quickly became clear: pedigree cows consistently delivered higher kilograms of solids with no drop in fertility. This early observation set the direction of the herd, inspiring Ronan to adopt the Dingle prefix and use pedigree sires across the full herd from 2016 onwards.

Ronan's breeding philosophy has been shaped by involvement in the Kerry Club, regular farm visits, and conversations with high performance pedigree breeders. Strategic purchases of heifers from leading herds helped accelerate gains in production, type, and fertility-strengthening the foundation of the Dingle herd.

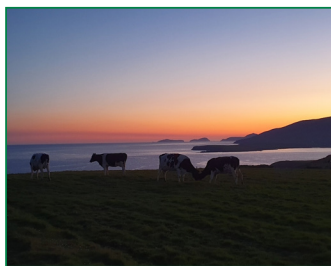


RONAN SIOCHRU - DINGLE HERD - CO.KERRY



FARM PERFORMANCE

2025 - Milk Recording 305d			
Cows	78		
Calving Interval	386 days		
Milk Yield kgs	9306		
Fat kgs (%)	398 (4.28)		
Protein kgs (%)	323 (3.47)		
Total Solids kgs	721		
Conformation Av.	87.7		
Lifetime Value/day	€3.86		
Average Parity	2.88		
Herd EBI	Milk SI	Fert SI	Health SI
€3.7	€46	€-37	€12



NEED TO KNOW INFORMATION

- Farming in a coastal, exposed environment with weather and salt damage challenges
- Long winter housing period of ~6 months, increasing reliance on stored feed
- High-performing herd with strong genetics and milk solids output

HOW WE FARM

FEEDING

- High input system: cows receive about 2.7 tonnes of concentrates per cow annually
- Winter diet based on silage and meal, essential due to long housing period
- Transition diet: silage + grass + concentrates as conditions improve
- Grazing system moving toward a hybrid model (grass + buffer feeding) to maximise intake and maintain production
- Flexible feeding: in good grass conditions, baled silage alone can meet demand without the need for a diet feeder

BREEDING

- AI used until mid-May, followed by stock bull for clean-up
- Extensive use of sexed semen to produce 50-60 heifers annually
- Replacement heifers selected using genotyping (HHP & CFP focus)

MANAGEMENT

- Calves housed indoors for first year due to harsh conditions
- Strong infrastructure: modern parlour, cubicles, calf shed
- Silage system: up to 4 cuts annually to ensure high-quality winter feed
- Careful response to environmental challenges to maintain grass supply

Shane, Gerard & Roseanne McHugh - Knockmullen Herd

In Fenagh, Co. Leitrim, the McHugh family has built a dairy enterprise rooted in tradition yet confidently evolving with the demands of modern farming. The farm, now home to the Knockmullen pedigree herd, is managed by Shane alongside his parents, Gerard and Roseann. Purchased by Shane's grandparents in 1959, the land has always centred on dairy, though Gerard expanded its scope in the early 1980s by establishing a fully integrated pig unit. Today that piggery-now operating exclusively as a fattening enterprise-finishes more than 8,000 pigs annually on contract for a local producer.

After ten years working with the IHFA as a classifier and Field Development Officer, Shane returned home fulltime three years ago. Supported by his wife Imelda and their young sons Nathan (7) and Aaron (4), he brought renewed focus to pedigree improvement, herd development, and management the dairy while also helping to manage the pig unit pig units.

The Knockmullen herd officially transitioned to pedigree status in 1995, guided by IHFA Field Development Officer Bobbie Franks, whose expertise helped identify key areas for genetic enhancement. A small number of pedigree heifers were initially purchased to elevate quality, but the foundation of the herd quickly became homebred. With classification introduced in 2004, Shane's passion for breeding and cow assessment shaped the herd's trajectory.



SHANE, GERARD & ROSEANNE MCHUGH - KNOCKMULLEN HERD - CO. LEITRIM



FARM PERFORMANCE

2025 - Milk Recording 305d

Cows	56
Calving Interval	385 days
Milk Yield kgs	7279
Fat kgs (%)	297 (4.08)
Protein kgs (%)	251 (3.45)
Total Solids kgs	548
Conformation Av.	84.1
Lifetime Value/day	€2.00
Average Parity	3.00

Herd EBI	Milk SI	Fert SI	Health SI
€78	€36	€14	€10



NEED TO KNOW INFORMATION

- Recently transitioned to a 100% spring-calving system
- 83% of cows calve in Feb-March to match grass supply
- Targeting 640 kg milk solids/cow and >5 lactations

HOW WE FARM

FEEDING

- Strong grass-based system, aiming to have cows fully out at grass day and night by 20th April
- Spring feeding includes silage + 8 kg concentrates, reduced to 6 kg after breeding
- Total concentrate use is about 1.7 tonnes per cow annually
- Feeding strategy designed to maximise grazed grass utilisation while supporting milk production
- System aligned with calving to ensure peak feed demand matches peak grass growth

BREEDING

- All dairy cows bred using sexed semen AI
- After 3-4 weeks of AI, switch to beef sires to increase calf value
- Strong focus on milk solids, fertility, and health traits
- Heifers synchronised and bred using fixed-time AI

MANAGEMENT

- Pre-breeding scans carried out in April to prepare herd
- Replacement rate ~15%, with surplus stock sold
- Significant reseedling (25% of farm in 3 years) to improve grass quality
- System focused on efficiency, grass utilisation, and long-term cow performance

Melvin & George Masterson - Boroside Herd

Masterson's Boroside is a farm where pedigree tradition and modern breeding innovation come together with striking effect. Managed by Melvin, his brother George, and their father George, the enterprise has evolved from its roots in their grandfather's time into a 130-cow high-performance pedigree dairy herd. While the previous generation milked 70-80 cows, today's herd has expanded significantly through a blend of proven cow families, strategic investment, and forward-thinking breeding systems.

Pedigree has long been central to the Masterson philosophy. The Boroside prefix, formally established in 2001, represents decades of breeding focus and herd development. Over time, the herd underwent a process of depopulation and rebuild, sourcing genetics from top Irish herds and progressive sires. The result is a youthful, energetic herd geared for high yield, longevity, and genetic advancement.

Alongside the main dairy operation, Melvin runs Masterscan Embryo Transfer, an expanding embryo transfer centre located beside the farm. Donors from across the country come to the facility, which manages both import and export of embryos worldwide. ET has accelerated genetic gain within the Masterson herd by allowing elite embryos to be implanted into non-replacement stock, enabling rapid improvement without increasing cow numbers. The family also maintains a line of pedigree Belgian Blue cattle, adding further depth to their breeding programme.



MELVIN & GEORGE MASTERSON - BOROSIDE HERD - CO.WEXFORD



FARM PERFORMANCE

2025 - Milk Recording 305d			
Cows	91		
Calving Interval	390 days		
Milk Yield kgs	8968		
Fat kgs (%)	404 (4.50)		
Protein kgs (%)	335 (3.74)		
Total Solids kgs	739		
Conformation Av.	86.3		
Lifetime Value/day	€3.20		
Average Parity	2.65		
Herd EBI	Milk SI	Fert SI	Health SI
€73	€39	€17	€12



NEED TO KNOW INFORMATION

- Split-calving system: 42% autumn / 58% spring, with very compact spring calving
- Strong focus on embryo transfer and high-genetic-merit animals
- Transitioning from grass to a more indoor, high-performance feeding system

HOW WE FARM

FEEDING

- Moving towards a fully controlled indoor feeding system to improve consistency and performance
- Planned diet includes maize silage, grass silage, treated barley, soya, and maize meal
- Previous system relied on grass, but drought-prone land required frequent buffer feeding
- Performance-driven change: indoor-fed cows produced 150 kg more milk solids per cow than grass-based cows
- Feeding system designed to support high-output cows and elite genetics programme
- Increased focus on feed space and cow comfort to maximise intake

BREEDING

- Only top cows bred to produce replacements; others used as embryo recipients
- Heavy use of embryo transfer to accelerate genetic gain
- Breeding programme focused on elite sires and high-value genetics
- Use of monitoring tools (collars) for heat detection and fertility management

MANAGEMENT

- System moving towards more indoor management for control and consistency
- Improvements in cubicles and sheds to increase cow comfort and feeding efficiency
- Calves housed longer (until in-calf stage) due to system design
- Enterprise combines milk production with embryo and calf sales for profitability

Denis O'Leary - Clochrúa Herd

At Clochrúa, Denis O'Leary oversees a dynamic and steadily evolving dairy enterprise shaped by decades of family commitment and continuous refinement. Following the recent retirement of David—who helped run the farm for 37 years—Denis now leads the 170 cow operation, supported by a fulltime staff member from Sri Lanka who joined the team in late 2025. The farm's history stretches back to 1985, when Denis' parents inherited a 60 cow herd. After completing agricultural college, Denis returned home in 1997 and began expanding the business, gradually purchasing quota to grow to 80-90 cows. By 2015, with Denis' father stepping back, the dairy herd had increased to 130 cows, and the farm had fully exited pig production. Expansion continued steadily, supported by rented land, ultimately reaching today's 170 cow herd. A formal move into pedigree breeding in 2000 reflected Denis' longstanding interest in genetics and herd development.

The farm extends across 210 acres, with a 160acre milking platform dedicated to grazing. Land varies from dry, free draining paddocks to heavier ground that requires more careful management. Pasture quality is a central priority, with an ongoing reseeding strategy that incorporates wholecrop barley. Crops harvested in August are used as part of the reseeding programme, helping paddocks return to productive grass quickly.

Cows are turned out by day in February, moving to fulltime grazing from mid March—weather permitting—and remain at grass until November. Denis typically reseeds around 20 acres per year, supporting consistent grass quality across the platform.

FARM PERFORMANCE

2025 - Milk Recording 305d			
Cows	133		
Calving Interval	369 days		
Milk Yield kgs	8124		
Fat kgs (%)	368 (4.53)		
Protein kgs (%)	299 (3.68)		
Total Solids kgs	664		
Conformation Av.	82.7		
Lifetime Value/day	€3.03		
Average Parity	3.30		

Herd EBI	Milk SI	Fert SI	Health SI
€181	€46	€78	€10



NEED TO KNOW INFORMATION

- Extremely compact system: 97% of cows calve Jan-March
- Targeting an 85% 6-week calving rate to match labour and facilities
- Highly data-driven system using genomics and EBI for replacements

HOW WE FARM

FEEDING

- Strong grass-based system, with grass as the main feed source throughout the year
- Concentrates fed at about 1.2 tonnes per cow annually. Meal feeding adjusted based on grass availability.
- Highly structured grazing system using strip grazing to maximise utilisation. Grazing approach staged:
1st graze -> 50% utilisation
2nd graze -> 75% utilisation
3rd graze -> full utilisation

BREEDING

- Replacement heifers selected using genomics and proven cow performance
- Strong focus on EBI, milk solids, SCC, and conformation
- Heifers bred to Angus bulls; only top cows produce replacements
- Use of high-quality sires from VG/EX cow families.

MANAGEMENT

- Automatic calf feeder improves labour efficiency and calf health
- Major investment in reseeding (90% of platform) and drainage to improve grass production
- Structured grazing management improves consistency and performance
- Focus on precision across calving, feeding, and breeding

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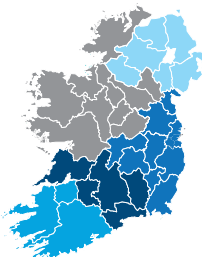
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