# Farmer Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2026

Sustainable Quality Assurance Scheme members' communication

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BORD BIA
Farmers & Growers

Origin Green IRELAND

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## Celebrating women in farming

On October 28th, Bord Bia, in collaboration with Ornua, hosted a special dinner celebrating the women behind Irish food and farming. Held as part of the Irish Country Living Women & Agriculture Conference 2026, the event recognised the invaluable contribution women make to Irish agriculture and our world-class food sector. Led by chef Rachel Allen, the 'People Behind the Plate' discussion featured beef farmer Orla Hogan, from Tuamgraney, Co. Clare, and dairy farmer Aileen Sheehan, from Whitechurch, Co. Cork, who shared their experiences of farming and their perspectives on its future.

## Bord Bia launches new farmer social media channels

Bord Bia has launched dedicated social media channels for farmers, offering updates on market trends and our work to promote Irish food and drink globally. The channels are part of Bord Bia's efforts to deepen engagement and communication with farmers. Follow **@bordbiafarm** on Instagram and Facebook and **@bord.bia.farm** on TikTok.



## Irish dairy opens its doors to international customers

September and October saw over 20 international dairy buyers visit Ireland to understand the benefits of sourcing grass-fed Irish dairy. Bord Bia, in collaboration with Irish dairy processors, hosted the visitors from China, Japan and Senegal on week-long itineraries.

The groups visited dairy farmers and dairy processing facilities in Cavan, Kilkenny, Cork and Roscommon. The trips featured meetings with Irish exporters to explore business opportunities and visits to retailers to showcase the various uses of Irish dairy including cheese, bakery, and confectionary.

The Bord Bia teams in Lagos, Shanghai and Tokyo are following up with all attendees to further business opportunities with potential Irish suppliers.






Congratulations to Kerry dairy farmer, William Dennehy, the Teagasc FBD Environmental Sustainable Farmer of the Year 2026. William was also the winner of the Improving Water Quality category. Pictured with his wife, Mary Dennehy. All entrants were assessed on their AgNav figures, utilising data gathered as part of certification to Bord Bia.

## Belgian buyers visit Ireland

September and October saw one of Ireland's key retail customers in continental Europe visit Ireland to gain a deeper understanding of the Irish grass-fed beef and lamb sectors. Across two separate visits, Bord Bia, in collaboration with ABP and Irish Country Meats (ICM), hosted beef and lamb buyers for a programme showcasing the quality, traceability and sustainability of Irish meat production.

Over the course of three days, the groups took part in retail study visits to Tesco Clarehall, Supervalu Knocklyon and Dunnes Stores Cornelscourt, alongside a visit to Angus Woods' organic farm and John Pringle's farm. The programme also included a tour of ICM's facilities and product display, followed by a visit to ABP's demonstration farm and a BBQ showcasing Irish beef and lamb. The final visit to ABP Cahir included a tour of the abattoir and cutting plant, alongside a product display.

Follow-up with ABP will focus on progressing the opportunities identified during the visits, while Bord Bia explores the possibility of a further visit in 2027 focused on the customers' sustainability team.






Margaret Hoctor, sheep farmer, Kilmullen farm

## A farmer's perspective on the SIAL trade show

**A group of farmers, including myself, received a Bord Bia invite to attend their Origin Green stand at SIAL trade show and then visit other farmers in Reims and surrounding areas.**

We had the opportunity to see a modern French dairy farm, a traditional beef cattle farm and a tour of the Champagne district to the exquisite Nicolas Feuillatte champagne-making facility.

What I have taken away from these three days is how important it is to step out of the bubble of day-to-day business and see how it is all done elsewhere.

SIAL gave us the opportunity to see the scale and size of the meat trade worldwide.

As farmers, we can work in isolation, so to be 'lifted off' the farm and find ourselves in a space of 8,000 stands in SIAL was just incredible. My mind was blown open. I know from speaking with the other farmers on tour they felt the same.

It was great to see the 'green' of the Origin Green Bord Bia Irish stand hold its own amid the world giants like Brazil and Argentina.

Business was being done behind the desk with Irish beef as the nibble of choice.

8,000 stands in total in SIAL – an extraordinary showcase of the ordinary, extraordinary and the innovators.

I got to visit the Welsh and Scottish lamb stands and was delighted to see our own breeds and presentation were on a par to them.

The Welsh market exporting the most of their lamb while in my own smaller world all our lamb (Kilmullen Farm) is going directly to the customer.

I came away relieved, proud and energised – that while we may be small, we are mighty! Keep going – we are on the right track!

I also learnt that climate change is very real with all farmers talking about the challenges of drought impacting yields, increasing inputs, and the need to adapt. So we are all in a similar situation.

What has truly motivated me is the passion for farming both from those I travelled with to those I met and within Bord Bia itself.

Our late and great poet laureate Seamus Heaney sums up the last three days for me.

"Catch the heart off guard and blow it open".

*Margaret Hoctor is a sheep farmer working alongside her husband Eamon Bourke selling their lamb direct as well as apple juice and sweetcorn.* ***www.kilmullenfarm.ie***



Dairy farmer, Fiona O'Donnell, from Golden, Co.Tipperary is one of three farmers featured in a new Bord Bia campaign on Irish dairy's grass fed strength. Scan the QR code to hear how Fiona, Martin Crowe, and David Hally manage and maximise their grassland.

# Why Ireland's grass-fed dairy system is increasingly relevant to global customers

**This summer's drought conditions, and the pressure they put on grass growth and fodder supplies, showed just how important grass is to Irish dairy.**

Despite these recent challenges, grass remains at the heart of Irish dairy farming. It is not only important for milk production, it is also a key part of what sets Irish dairy apart in export markets.

International dairy buyers have traditionally focused on factors such as the volume available and the price they pay. However, carbon reduction is becoming an increasingly important consideration for major food companies.

David Kennedy, Head of Dairy at Bord Bia, explains: "Global buyers have been traditionally measured against how much volume they can buy and what price they can buy it for, but ever increasingly we're seeing those buyers now have targets around carbon reduction."

Many large food companies have set net-zero targets, with Kennedy saying this is influencing how they assess potential suppliers.

"To do that, they're prioritising suppliers who can give them lower carbon products."

According to Kennedy, this can create opportunities for Irish dairy, with customers looking to increase the proportion of their supply coming from countries and companies that can demonstrate and verify the emissions performance of their dairy production.

"Origin Green helps puts Ireland to the front of the queue when those global manufacturers are deciding who they want to source from."

However, the claims made about sustainability need to be supported by robust evidence.

"Origin Green data at company and farm level, gives global trade buyers the security of knowing that data is robust and independently verified."

## What does grass-fed mean to the customer?

While grass is fundamental to how Irish dairy is produced, Kennedy said the reasons international customers and consumers value grass-fed can vary.

"The beauty, I suppose, of our grass-fed position or our grass-fed offering is it can mean many good things to many different people."

For some consumers, grass-fed is associated with taste, with the reputation of Irish butter internationally providing one example.

For others, Kennedy said it can be linked to animal welfare or naturalness, while some customers are particularly interested in the emissions profile of grass-based production.

## Standing over Ireland's grass-fed claims

Bord Bia introduced a grass-fed standard in collaboration with industry to provide a clear framework for substantiating grass-fed claims.

"It's a really important mechanism to stand over the robustness of our grass-fed claims."

For Kennedy, the combination of Ireland's grass-based production system and independent verification provides a way to demonstrate the characteristics of Irish dairy to customers around the world.

The aim, he said, is ultimately to help Irish dairy exporters secure the most value possible from international markets for Irish dairy farmers.





# Bord Bia Farmer Forum

**The Bord Bia Farmer Forum was established this year to give farmers and growers a stronger voice in Bord Bia's work and provide more structured, two-way engagement with Quality Assurance scheme members. A total of 100 farmers and growers were invited to take part, representing different sectors, regions and farm types. Topics for discussion included Quality Assurance, Origin Green, the audit experience, customer requirements, promotional activity and consumer trends.**

The 100-member Forum has met twice, in June and September, with a third meeting planned for early December. The Farmer Forum Committee develops the agenda ahead of each meeting, collates the feedback and agrees the action items from each Forum meeting. It includes representatives from six farming organisations (the IFA, ICMSA, INHFA, ICSA, Macra and Irish Grain Growers), alongside independent farmer representatives.

Discussions at the first meeting focused on three key themes: Bord Bia's role, farm assurance schemes, and market promotion and development. The second meeting included discussions on the Bord Bia Food Processor Standard, Origin Green company sustainability standards, and Bord Bia structures (boards and technical advisory committees). At each meeting, participants spent almost four hours discussing these topics and sharing a wide range of perspectives and practical suggestions.

## Roadshow

**Bord Bia received more than 600 applications when the Forum opened in May. In response to this interest, Bord Bia expanded opportunities for farmers to have their say through regional roadshows alongside the main Bord Bia Farmer Forum meetings.**

**Nearly 200 farmers attended Bord Bia's Farmer Forum Roadshow over three nights this October in Dungarvan, Carlow and Athlone. The meetings gave farmers an opportunity to speak directly with Bord Bia, ask questions and share feedback on the issues that matter to them.**

**Farmers raised questions about Quality Assurance, Origin Green, market access, the value delivered back to farms, communication, trust and governance. Most said they accept the need for audits and achievable improvements to the standards but wanted clearer evidence of why requirements are needed and how Bord Bia's work delivers value for farmers. They also called for clearer, more regular communication and greater transparency.**

**Feedback from the roadshow will help shape future engagement with farmers and growers, with a focus on clearer answers, practical evidence and examples, and continued opportunities for direct discussion.**

## How were the 100 participants chosen?

**All Quality Assured farmers and growers were invited to apply for membership of the Bord Bia Farmer Forum. Bord Bia then used a model to randomly select 100 farmers and growers across categories covering age, farm size, region, gender and farm type. The number selected in each category aims to make the Forum broadly representative of the Quality Assurance database. For example, beef farmers are the largest category, so more beef farmers were selected. A final check confirmed that the selected farmers and growers were currently certified. Tillage farmers are also represented due to the current Combinable Crops assurance scheme pilot.**





## Irish beef outlook

Weekly cattle throughput is currently running 6,000-7,000 head above the exceptionally low levels recorded in late 2025. This increased processing activity is helping to meet the seasonal uplift in demand in the lead-up to Christmas. Higher kill levels in recent weeks have also narrowed the deficit evident earlier in the year. Total cattle throughput year-to-date stand at 1.32 million head, now in line with the corresponding period in 2025. A greater availability of slaughter-fit cattle entering autumn 2026 has supported a recovery in prime cattle throughput, which now exceeds one million head. Cull cow numbers have also increased steadily through September and October and are expected to remain firm for the remainder of the year. Despite this recovery, overall throughput levels remain below longer-term historical averages.

Average carcase weights have increased significantly across all cattle categories in 2026, further boosting beef production. Between January and September, average steer carcase weights reached 360kg, an increase of 17kg on the same period in 2025. Heifer carcase weights increased by 12kg to 317kg, while average cow carcase weights rose by 3kg to 303kg. Producers continue to hold cattle for longer periods and finish them at heavier weights in an effort to maximise returns and offset the high cost of store cattle.

Beef export volumes to the end of August 2026, the latest data available at the time of writing, were down 6% year-on-year at 295,000 tonnes. However, the combination of stronger cattle throughput and higher carcase weights is expected to support a stronger export performance during the final months of the year. Reduced export availability during the first eight months of 2026 contributed to a 3% decline in export value to just over €2 billion. The UK and Europe remain the dominant destinations for Irish beef exports, each accounting for 48% of trade year-to-date, with international markets making up the balance. This continued focus on nearby markets reflects declining beef production in both regions alongside generally resilient consumer demand.

## Irish sheepmeat outlook

Tightening sheepmeat supplies have helped provide stability to the Irish sheep trade as we move into the final months of the year. Market reports indicate that supplies remain broadly aligned with demand, while the quality of lambs being presented for processing has remained strong despite challenging grass-growing conditions across many parts of the country during the summer months.

Irish sheep throughput has declined during 2026, driven in the most part by lower hogget supplies and a significant reduction in imports from Northern Ireland for processing. However, the rate of decline has been less severe than that experienced in the UK and many other EU member states. This relative resilience, coupled with reduced sheepmeat production across Europe, has helped support demand for Irish lamb across key export markets.

While inflationary pressures and consumer price sensitivity continue to influence purchasing decisions, sheepmeat consumption across the EU and UK has remained steady. Demand is increasingly being supported by growth in halal markets, while a greater emphasis on whole-carcase utilisation is creating opportunities for exporters capable of consistently delivering the specifications required by international customers.

Global supply dynamics also remain supportive. Sheep production in both Australia and New Zealand continues to be constrained by flock reductions, land-use competition and weather-related challenges. As a result, lamb prices in the Southern Hemisphere have strengthened, reducing the competitiveness of imported product on European and UK markets and reinforcing the position of Irish sheepmeat.

Looking ahead, the medium-term outlook for the Irish sheep trade remains encouraging. Constrained global supplies, resilient demand and Ireland's strong reputation for producing high-quality sheepmeat are helping provide some stability to the sector.









## Live exports

Steady demand from key export markets during the second half of the year has supported the trade for both weanlings and store cattle. However, recent developments regarding access to Algeria serve as a reminder of the challenging international trading environment and the vulnerability of export-dependent trade flows.

The availability of cattle, combined with the strong performance of Irish cattle in export markets, continue to be the primary factors underpinning demand. Long-standing relationships between Irish exporters and international customers have also played an important role in maintaining and securing market opportunities. Reduced cattle numbers across many European countries have further supported demand for Irish cattle, with tightening supplies increasing buyer competition, particularly for quality animals suited to intensive finishing systems.

While current levels of live exports are running 10% behind last year, reflecting tighter domestic supplies and some market access challenges, underlying demand remains steady.

Looking ahead, the outlook for the live trading of animals remains challenging. While continued supply constraints across the EU are expected to support demand and prices, maintaining market access, safeguarding Ireland's animal health status and ensuring sufficient transport and shipping capacity will remain critical to securing the long-term competitiveness of the live cattle export sector.

## Autumn investment

Bord Bia has invested €1,000,000 in an autumn beef marketing campaign across the UK and key EU markets to support the Irish farming sector.

The campaign is promoting Bord Bia Quality Assured Irish steak in the UK, Belgium and Italy, with a focus on stewing cuts in the Netherlands.

The campaign combines advertising aimed at trade buyers and consumers. In the UK, Bord Bia is working with key retail partners to promote Irish steaks, including an organic Irish beef promotion with a leading online retailer.

In Belgium, adverts are running in prominent food magazines, while in Italy, Irish Grass Fed Beef is being promoted through outdoor advertising in Milan, and in-store promotions with leading retailers. Digital advertising and influencer partnerships also aim to drive demand amongst consumers for Irish beef. The Dutch campaign combines promotions across several retailers as well as digital advertising and influencers partnerships also.

Bord Bia's 'Beef...Because You Deserve It' campaign ran in Ireland for three weeks from 24th August, targeting shoppers aged 25-44. It showcased mince, burgers and steaks as tasty, nutritious and convenient options for everyday meals, rather than just weekend treats. Advertising across TV players, radio, outdoor retail sites and social media encouraged shoppers to choose beef with the Bord Bia Quality Mark, supporting Quality Assured farmers and producers. Results from the campaign are very positive, with 66% of the audience feeling encouraged to purchase Irish beef in the future after seeing the TV ad.










Examples of Bord Bia's Autumn beef promotions in the UK and Europe

# Origin Green: key facts

**Origin Green was established to promote Ireland's food and drink sector internationally and strengthen its position in competitive overseas markets. Origin Green demonstrates that companies are subject to independently verified sustainability commitments. Member companies are required to develop five-year sustainability plans across environmental and social sustainability targets such as emissions, water management, packaging, responsible sourcing and health and nutrition. This helps the food and drink sector respond to customer demand for sustainably produced food, going beyond what Quality Assurance schemes alone address.**

## Is Origin Green company membership only for meat and dairy companies?

No. Bord Bia's remit covers the whole Irish food and drink industry therefore Origin Green membership includes businesses across sectors such as confectionery, drinks, seafood and bakery, as well as meat and dairy.

## Is the Origin Green logo used on products?

No. The logo does not certify the origin of individual products and it cannot be used on products. The logo is used by companies when communicating with other business to show that they are members of a national food and drink sustainability programme.

## Does Origin Green set any requirements around sourcing?

Through their sustainability plans, members must source from Bord Bia Quality Assured farms, where applicable, and set targets to increase those volumes over time. This has helped deliver measurable results: among members with a relevant Quality Assurance scheme available, average QA-sourced volumes have increased from 72% to 92% over ten years of reporting.

## Can Origin Green members import non-Irish ingredients?

Sourcing ingredients internationally is common practice across Ireland's food and drink industry. These are commercial decisions for individual companies, and Bord Bia has no authority to prohibit them. As a State-funded body operating within EU competition, internal market and State aid rules, Bord Bia cannot make Irish-only sourcing a condition of Origin Green membership.

## Is there a minimum percentage of which the food product sold by an Origin Green member company must be of Irish origin?

Requiring a minimum 'Irish only' percentage is not allowed by EU competition law, internal market and state aid rules. However, where Quality Assured Irish ingredients are available, a company cannot be an Origin Green member if it sources only a very small proportion of those ingredients. This would not meet the audit requirements for responsible sourcing.

## What requirements must a company meet to become an Origin Green member?

To be eligible to apply for Origin Green membership, a company must produce or handle food for human consumption, have annual turnover of more than €100,000, have an ROI-based production facility.

All members are required to complete annual reporting with the independent auditor body. Membership is contingent on ongoing progress against sustainability targets and compliance with relevant environmental and regulatory requirements.

