

Dairy-4-Future Project – Exchange visit to Brittany

Dairy-4-Future is an exciting new €3.8 million Atlantic Interreg funded project aiming to improve the sustainability of dairy farming in the Atlantic regions of Europe. Economic, environmental and social sustainability of dairy farming will be addressed by the project. A consortium of eleven partners from eight countries including Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales, Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal are involved. In addition, the project has been supported by 21 associate partners including Lakeland Dairies and the UFU in N Ireland. From Scotland to the Azores, the Dairy-4-Future project aims to increase the competitiveness, sustainability and resilience of dairy farms through the development of innovative and efficient dairy systems and increased cooperation between research and development stakeholder groups.

At the heart of the project are a group of 100 Pilot Farmers and 10 Experimental Farms drawn from all the regions involved. Detailed data on economic, environment and social sustainability aspects of dairy farming have been collected and are currently being analysed. The analysis will assess how the differing management practices across the diverse systems of dairy farming in the Atlantic area can contribute to increasing milk price resilience, reducing ammonia and greenhouse gas emissions and encourage generational renewal on dairy farms in the region.

As a key part of the project, 10 local dairy farmers participating in the project recently had the opportunity to undertake a 2-day exchange visit to Brittany in France. The exchange visit included visits to Brittany dairy farms, dinner with local farmers and advisers and a visit to the Derval Experimental farm north of Nantes.

Table 1. Performance of Brittany dairy farms hosting N. Ireland exchange visitors

<i>Farm</i>	<i>Earl de Boureau</i>	<i>GAEC RBX Holstein</i>	<i>Earl Glehello</i>	<i>Derval</i>	<i>CAFRE Benchmarking Top 10%</i>
Herd size	57	85	100	86	190
Grassland proportion of area (%)	25	31	35	53	n/a
Maize proportion of forage area (%)	62	32	25	39	n/a
Forage area stocking rate (LU/ha)	1.9	1.6	1.7	1.3	2.6
Mineral fertiliser N use (kg/ha)	70.0	80.0	61.0	32	n/a
Milk yield (litres)	9,277	8,470	8,111	8,540	8,538
Fat (g/kg)	40.8	41.4	44.5	42.0	41.0
Protein (g/kg)	33.9	34.4	34.5	34.0	33.2
Concentrates fed (kg)	2,006	1,144	1,289	1,224	2,696
Concentrates fed (kg/kg FCM)	0.21	0.13	0.16	0.14	0.31
*Milk from forage (kg/cow)	4,819	5,928	5,247	5,820	2,548
Milk price (€/1000 litres)	341	350	360	n/a	n/a
Gross margin (£/litre @1.10 €/£)	0.23	0.25	0.23	n/a	0.18
Milk production per labour unit (litres)	480,818	237,667	208,750	n/a	905,908

*Milk yield less (concentrate (kg)/0.45)

Some of the management practices that particularly impressed the N. Ireland farmers on the exchange visit were:

- The low concentrate use per cow and per litre relative to milk yields
- Grassland management standards
- Conserved forage quality
- Low nitrogen fertilizer use on the farms
- Family lifestyle focus of the Brittany dairy farmers

The N. Ireland farmers participating in the exchange visit were surprised by:

- Low land prices in Brittany, between €5,000 and €10,000 per hectare
- Extent of mixed dairy farming and cereal cropping land use on the farms
- Relatively low milk output productivity per labour unit on the Brittany dairy farms (309,078 litres per labour unit compared to 905,908 on the top 10% farms in Northern Ireland)
- Lack of drive by Brittany farmers to expand their business
- Perceived potential for watercourse pollution from dirty water run-off from farmyards.

The purpose of these Dairy-4-Future exchange visits is to exchange innovations and ideas to improve the sustainability of dairy farming across the regions involved. Following the visit, a detailed report has been drawn up which lists follow-up information required to facilitate the exchange of innovations between regions. A number of innovations highlight from this exchange visit include the following, which will be the subject of further Dairy-4-Future press publicity in N. Ireland. The full exchange visit report is available on www.dairy4future.eu.

Innovations experienced in Brittany planned for further dissemination include:

- Organization of succession planning on farms in Brittany
- Different levels of milk pricing offered by the milk buyers in Brittany
- French national scheme to reduce antibiotic use on farms
- Research data on soil organic matter degradation in arable areas without livestock manures