

Royal passion for farming and hunting

ON FARM WITH... CHRISTY REYNOLDS

Walterstown,
Co Meath



PAT O'KEEFE
NEWS EDITOR

IN the north east, Christy Reynolds is highly respected. Currently milking 450 cows, he supplies Glanbia and Lanceland from his farm at Walterstown, just off the main N3 between Dunshaughlin and Navan.

A former intercounty footballer with Meath, his late father — also Christy — migrated from Termonfeckin, Co Louth to Walterstown in the 1940s. Louth's loss has been Meath's gain, with the Reynolds brothers — Christy, Pat, Gerry, Paul and Ray — making a huge contribution to farming, football and community life generally in the royal county.

On arrival at the farm last Friday, I found Christy on his quad going through the 220 strong spring-calving herd, checking for cows in heat. Not much is left to chance — the herd is tail painted and they also run vasectomised bulls. Cows are scanned once they have gone 42 days post service.

A warm and charismatic man, Christy has grown his dairy enterprise over the last 20 years to the point where he is one of Ireland's largest producers.

ENTHUSIASM

With sons Alan and David now joining him at home, he is full of enthusiasm for more. An anaerobic digester is being considered by business graduate Alan, which Christy reckons would throw up "unbelievable spin off opportunities".

Christy thinks that there are more opportunities than ever in Ireland today. Interestingly, because Ireland had it so soft during the boom, he believes that "it will take another three or four years for lads to get hungry enough".

Christy's current development phase started in 1990, when the home farm was divided up and he set out with 110 cows. He gradually built numbers, renting land and quota.



Christy Reynolds pictured with sons Alan and David and their hunters. The spring calving herd is in the background.

CHRISTY REYNOLDS ON

Family: Wife Mary, sons Alan, David and Mark, and daughter Karen. Mary does all farm accounts and prepares monthly budgets.

Marketing: "Ireland exports 90% of what we produce, but we are probably not doing enough of the Michael O'Leary in processing and marketing that output. If I were 20 again, I would

go into pasteurising my own milk."

Advice to young people: "Travel, learn, then get stuck in. Go bald headed — one plus one does not always have to make two. You have to take chances."

Advice to young farmer? "When I started farming, my ambition was to be able to employ a man and get

time off. You'll be murdered while you're growing, but lads starting out should have that ambition to grow large enough to employ someone."

Motto: "Work hard, play hard. I always say to the lads; I've no problem with someone going out for a night, as long as you're fit to get up for work the next morning".

(Christy admits that he tested that motto last weekend, with the family hosting a 21st birthday bash for daughter, Karen).

Outlook: "For a lot of my time in farming, it was the poor man's job. I see a great future for young farmers today."

2003 was a major milestone, as Christy and his wife Mary purchased a top class dairy farm at Stamullen. It was a bold move which he admits put them under pressure for a while.

Looking back now, he describes it as "the best day's work we ever did". The farm currently carries all replacement stock.

"It worked out well — it leaves us with the scale for the lads to farm," Christy said.

David studied at Greenmount College in Northern Ireland and also completed a stint in New Zealand. During a visit to see him, Christy learned the value of grass budgeting.

"In the milking shed, I saw

a graph on the wall, showing the wedge of grass ahead of the cows. I asked them to explain it to me and the penny dropped."

They now walk the farm with a plate meter every Monday, completing a grass wedge on the AgriNet system.

The target last week was 27kg of milk from grass. "At this time of year, we use the autumn calving herd to skin a paddock to ensure green leaf to the butt for the spring calvers on the next round," he explained.

When David returned home, they considered the crossbreeding option. "I'm thankful that we didn't go that route. If you've a herd of crossbreds, you're limited on yield," Christy said.

"They are a grand cow when milk is 20c/litre. But I expect that we will continue to have peaks and troughs, and they will be deeper and higher.

"We need to retain the machine to roll out the milk at high prices," he added.

The Reynolds herd is Holstein Friesian with recent emphasis on high EBI bulls to improve fertility.

With a liquid milk contract, there are distinct autumn and winter calving periods, with no calving from 15 December until 25 January.

"It's a great break and we usually get away for a holiday," Christy said.

Overall herd average is around 8,000kg per cow. The

feeding philosophy involves keeping a close eye on constituents to gauge whether cows are being fully fed. Silage is cut early, with 80% DMD and 30% dry matter the first cut target.

At present, the spring calving herd are buffer fed with 5.5kg of concentrates, 4kg of brewer's grain and some straw.

FEEDERS

There are no feeders in the 16 bail double-up rapid exit parlour; the new parlour being planned won't have them either. Current plans centre around a 40 point mid-line rapid exit.

"We will do a lot of the work ourselves. We constructed a big shed here two

years ago with 500 cubicles and realised it is not rocket science. And there is plenty of labour about," he said.

Good facilities are important to Christy.

"I can come home on a winter's evening and walk through the cows in comfort in the shed. You have to have pride in what you're doing; I couldn't go out and check cows on a pad."

He added: "For someone to come after you, the job has to be attractive".

After enjoying his company for a few hours, I sensed a love for farming.

"It's a great life — you're your own boss, you're a vet, an accountant, a grass manager. Aren't we lucky to have the lifestyle we have?"

Chairman of a hunt fighting for survival

CHRISTY Reynolds played football at the highest level for club and county, as well as taking on the chairmanship of his club, Walterstown. But, these days, he gets his buzz from following the Ward Union Hunt, Ireland's only remaining stag hunt.

As chairman for the past two years, he has been busy fighting a rearguard action to prevent Minister for the Environment John Gormley's Wildlife Bill from putting his beloved hunt out of business. Christy is passionate about their right to continue the 156-year-old tradition.

The Ward Union has joined forces with other country pursuit followers to form the RISE group — Rural Ireland Says Enough! They are lobbying TDs and holding nationwide public meetings. They are also planning a national rally in Dublin once the Wildlife Bill is introduced to the Dail. "If they succeed in banning stag hunting, the hare will be next and then the fox," Christy said.

From his meetings with politicians, he has sensed a perception that the Ward Union is elitist and dominated by wealthy developers and rich barristers.

"Maybe in the past it was something else, but it has changed; there is a different set. I have to say there are a great bunch of people involved, who would do anything for you," he said.

"There are plumbers, elec-

tricians and we have as many farmers and landowners as possible," he said. "All my children hunt, as well as their cousins. It's a big social thing," he explained.

REGULATED

He argued that the hunt is highly regulated, with a vet and two rangers paid by the State to monitor activities. "There have reported no problems since they started their monitoring," he said.

The Ward Union breed their own stags from their pure Irish deer herd on their 50-acre holding at Dunshaughlin. "If we're banned from stag hunting, we will close up," he said. "The Minister must answer the question — what will happen our pure herd of Irish deer and our hounds?"

Has Christy Reynolds met the Minister? "I have tried to meet him, but he has never met me. I approached him once at a function and he said, he would meet me, but it never happened."

Reynolds said that the hunt has four full-time employees and a study has shown that it is worth €1.4m per year to the local area. He points to the fact that the hunt collects 5,000 fallen animals per year at a reasonable rate, with prompt collection and post mortem facilities available. "If the hunt goes, this will be a major loss to the farming community in this region," he said.



The Ward Union has joined forces with other country pursuit followers to form the RISE group — Rural Ireland Says Enough!



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CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE 2010 REMINDER CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE

The 2010 Census of Agriculture questionnaire was issued to all farmers recently for return by **June 8th**. Please note that the 2010 Census of Agriculture is a statutory survey which you are obliged to complete.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) would like to remind you to return any outstanding questionnaires without delay. If you require a replacement questionnaire or would like to give the information by phone, please contact the CSO on:

LoCall: 1890 924 990

E-mail: agri@cso.ie.

The purpose of the 2010 Census of Agriculture is to compile statistics on the structure of all agricultural holdings as of 1st June 2010. This data is required to meet national and EU requirements for regular statistics on agricultural activity. The information supplied will be treated as strictly confidential and used for statistical purposes only. This is guaranteed by national and EU law.

The CSO would like to thank you for your co-operation with this survey.



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