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"We started with 40 acres and over the last number of years we built that up to 300 acres.. All the beef that we produce gets processed and used in our own operations."



Meet: Liam Gavin

Country: Ireland



Introduction

- Myself and my wife Justina started farming here in 2012. The holding has been in my family for generations.
- We started with 40 acres and over the past 13 years have built that up to about 300 acres, through a mix of land purchase and land lease.
- We have a pedigree Dexter suckler herd and finish all our own animals.
- We also have a small number of sheep and some laying hens.
- Another element of the farm is our market garden, where we grow salads and vegetables.
- The market for all our produce is the two restaurants and farm shops that we own
- What makes our farm stand out from most is that it is fully certified organic. We have been fully certified organic since 2015



Your Current Skills

I hold a Bachelor's Degree in Agricultural Science from UCD, but I have had to upskill over the years as the industry evolves, and I have also developed specific skills to manage an organic farm. Upskilling is generally facilitated through Teagasc, the National Agriculture and Food Development Authority in Ireland. We have regular meetings with our designated farm advisor, who informs us of new ideas, and he also organises 8 or 10 Discussion Group meetings each year. With about 20 -25 organic farmers at each meeting, and they usually take place at one of our farms, where we can demonstrate something we have implemented, or they may invite an expert to update us on new skills or techniques. As an example, a Veterinary expert spoke to us recently about disease control, or an Organic advisor to update us on new rules or regulations.

Other than that, I use the internet for research, and the other members of the discussion group are a great resource for learning new things, as well as social interaction.



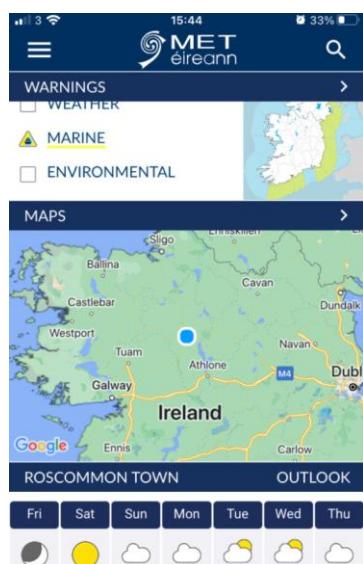
Describe how you currently use Technology

I use an App called [Herdwatch](#) for the cattle. Its quite sophisticated, and I probably only use it for basic functions and could get a lot more out of it but its really useful for calving, and weights.



I also have a remote camera with an App so that I can monitor calving at any time, from any location, and generally keep an eye on the cows.

In the business, we use an accounts package. We also use the government electronic system for updating all animal transfers which is useful. I also use the [Met Eireann weather app](#) regularly.



What are your current and future training needs?



It is learning how to maximise my use of the tools that I have. I know Herdwatch for example has many really great features , but for me, I am only using the most basic ones.



Challenges and Opportunities for Upskilling?

Finding time to upskill is the main challenge and broadband has been another. I am part of an Online Training Scheme run by the Department of Agriculture. They have different modules, and you can do it at your own pace. There are how-to videos and information, and there are quizzes after each one, so you have to pass one module before you can go on to the next one. This works very well, having to do the quiz means you listen more actively than if it's just a webinar, you know you will have to demonstrate what you learned, and it's a great feeling when you get a great score.



Recommendations?

I would recommend all farmers join a peer discussion group or network. As well as learning at the events, you learn from each other, there is a great social element, and you develop a support network for yourself.

Top Tip

"Self-paced modular learning works best, it allows you to go back and continue where you last left it. I find that very useful"



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