

Consider Biosecurity Risks at Summer Fairs

WVS would like to strongly encourage you to consider the biosecurity implications of showing bovine animals at fairs and exhibits this summer.

How avian influenza is spread is not fully understood at this point in time, but there is a risk that any bovine animal returning to your farm could introduce this new disease. If you do introduce this disease into your herd, there is a risk of significant loss of milk production. Also, from what we are learning, the disease can cause multiple mid-lactation animals to dry up, failing to return to production.

This could mean cows with extended dry periods and associated problems at the following calving.

A Look at Agriculture in Ireland

By Dr. Ralph Stowell

My wife likes to joke that the only way she'd get me to go overseas or, really anywhere, is if there's something to hunt or an ag tour involved. She's not wrong. After a little persuasion, I decided this spring to join my wife and our two sons on the agriculture tour to Ireland with the area FFA chapters. It was a fantastic trip and the farm tours were the highlight.

We left for Ireland the end of May, before school was out, and after two days of traveling and seeing some of the city of Dublin, we finally started our farm tours. The Lynch Dairy Farm was our first stop and we learned that Nolan Lynch lived and worked in the U.S. for Altech for 10 years before returning to the farm. His farm is an 80-cow robotic dairy managed with rotational grazing. He has one GEA robot that cost him about \$100,000, after he received thousands in government subsidies to help pay for it. He said his cows averaged 2.2 visits per day and gave about 60 lbs of milk. That milk production was only a little lower than normal because of the wet, cold weather they were having this spring. Lynch said in order to take advantage of the growing season for the rotational grazing, they dry all the cows up at the same time and then they all calve in at the same time in the spring. Most dairies there are about the same size as his herd, with the largest being about 500 cows.

The biggest challenge for dairies in Ireland and the EU is the regulations. We thought we had it bad, but it is stifling for our Ireland counterparts. Lynch explained that they're only allowed 0.8 cows per acre. They need to keep track of every drug that they use on the cattle down to the ml and why it is used. This is entered into a government database and inspectors come out to the farm regularly. I didn't ask what happens when they're off on their inventory. Lynch said their spring was terribly cold and wet and that they were nine weeks behind on



Pictured above is the dairy in Ireland that Dr. Ralph toured recently. He's pictured below with the Irish dairy farmer and his sons, Wyatt and Oscar on the FFA trip.

planting. They were also behind on applying fertilizer. He explained that if they didn't get it applied in the next week, they wouldn't be able to use it this year. We asked about his veterinary services. He told us the vets moved their office about 30 minutes away from the area and him and the other area farmers told them it was too far away, so the vets put a satellite office within 5 minutes of them.

Continued on back page.

Continued from front page.

Quite different than our 1-2 hour call service radius.

To supplement his dairy operation, he also owns a fencing business and leads these agriculture tours regularly. He was a great guy to talk with, and all of our FFA students and I agreed we could have spent the day there.

We spent another part of a day at a farm that raised vegetables and grass-fed beef for their motels in the city. Our FFA kids were put to work planting broccoli, then we walked the farm looking at the various crops including corn and other small grains. I was amazed at what you can grow in gravel. Our boys will forever have a whole new outlook on, "picking rocks," after seeing the fields in Ireland. It reminded me of soil we see in far northern Wisconsin. They also planted all of their field corn with a plant starch film to try to get it to germinate more uniformly in less than great growing conditions. This farm raises mostly angus/Holstein crossbreeds and their cattle eat very little corn because of the expense. Most everything lives on grass with their calves getting a mix of small grains for a short time then on to full grass with aggressive rotation.

When you think of Ireland you likely think of wool. We saw sheep everywhere grazing the hillsides and roaming freely through the countryside, often with no fences and on the roads. Color sprayed markings identified the farm they belonged to. Each farmer has their own color code, so if a lamb wanders, they are able to find it or someone else can and bring it back to them.

We watched a fantastic sheep dog herding demonstration and learned about the country's history with sheep and wool. Here again the farmers talked about the government control on how the land should be tended to. At one time sheep farmers in Ireland could get top dollar for wool, but now there's not much for profit in it. The sheep farmer said he makes more money on the number of flowers grown in his pasture than he does for the wool. The EU pays an inspector to come count them.

The history of Ireland was incredible to learn about from each farmer. Throughout our 10-day tour we visited



a dairy farm, vegetable/beef farm, apple orchard, strawberry farm, sheep farm and an oyster operation. We toured



cathedrals and castles that were a thousand years old. We drove by the oldest pub in Ireland that opened in the year 1189. We ate lunch in a pub that was famed to be owned by the man that executed King Charles the first. The pub was fittingly called, "The King's Head."

One thing you achieve by traveling out of country is that it brings a new found appreciation for what we have here. Most everyone on this green earth strives to be like us. Just look how many democracies or republics have come about since our independence.

One thing I can say is I thank God every day that my ancestors came to America. This land is truly the land of opportunity. I will also say that the farmers I met in Ireland have the same dedication to do whatever it takes to maintain their connection to the land and the animals or plants they raise. They will work two jobs on top of working the farm because that is what makes their lives fulfilled. We all have more in common than we differ.



Pictured at top is the sheep dog herding demonstration. In the middle is the dairy farmer and above Ralph and Wyatt plant broccoli in the rocky Ireland soil.

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