

Samhain Newsletter



Welcome to our November newsletter!



We've just passed through Samhain and it's our last newsletter of the year. It's a fantastic time to look back on where we've been but also looking ahead to where we're going.

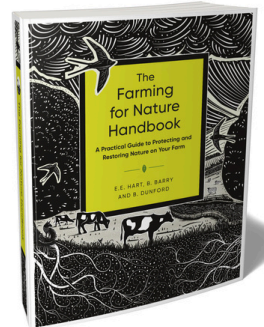
This season sees the culmination of a lot of hard work over the year, come to fruition. Our Annual Ambassador Awards ceremony took place recently and our new Handbook is about to be launched. Read on for this and a **lot** more news...

FARMING FOR NATURE HANDBOOK LAUNCHING

We are excited to announce that the Farming for Nature Handbook will be launching next week. There will be 2 launch venues; Killruddery House, Co. Wicklow on Thursday 28th November and Charlie Bryne's bookshop in Galway on Friday the 29th.

The launches are open to all, we'd love to see you. If you'd like to attend please RSVP before 26th November. [RSVP here.](#)

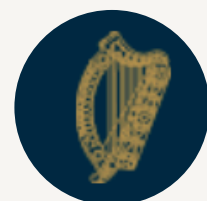
Is there someone in your life that wants to farm for nature but doesn't have the know-how? Do they prefer the page to the screen? If that person is also on the Christmas list, this is the book for them! Shop [here.](#)



PRAISE FOR THE HANDBOOK FROM UACHTARÁIN NA HÉIREANN MICHAEL D. HIGGINS

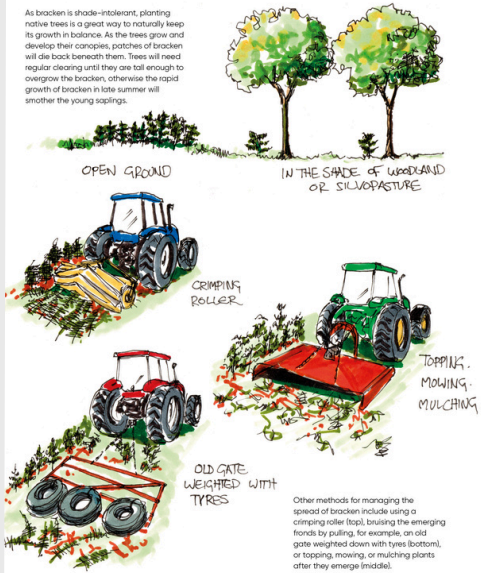


'A timely and essential contribution to the ongoing discourse on how we, as a society, must respond to some of the most pressing challenges of our time – the perilous consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss, and the future of our rural landscapes. Comhghairdeas libh'



Farming for Nature would like to sincerely thank our Publishing Champions, Ballymaloe Cookery School, Ballymaloe Foods and Bread 41. We'd also like to thank our launch sponsors Bread 41, Wicklow Wolf, Tindal Wines, Killruddery and Charlie Byrne's Bookshop. We are very grateful too for the ongoing support of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the BurrenBeo Trust and the Lifes 2 Good Foundation, without whom this book would never have been published.

As bracken is shade-intolerant, planting native trees is a great way to naturally keep its growth in balance. As the trees grow and develop their canopies, patches of bracken will die back beneath them. Trees will need regular clearing until they are tall enough to overgrow the bracken, otherwise the rapid growth of bracken in late summer will smother the young saplings.



Other methods for managing the spread of bracken include using a crimping roller (soil), leaving the emerging fronds by pulling, for example, on an old gate weighted down with tyres (bottom), or topping, mowing, or mulching plants after they emerge (middle).

5 Manage 'noxious' weeds with sensitivity to nature

Species well known to be listed in the Noxious Weeds Act include thistles, ragwort, and dock, although common barberry, the male wild hop plant, and wild oats are also listed, while blackgrass may soon be added. Farmers are required by law to control these species. However, thistles, ragwort, and dock are native plants and beneficial to a wide range of wildlife. As such, sensitive management is key to controlling their spread when farming for nature.

Table 12.4: Examples of common 'noxious weed' species found on Irish farms and notes on their management

Species	Notes
Docks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Docks are the food plant of the hideous green dock beetle, whose eggs and caterpillars provide food for other species such as frogs and birds. The seed heads of docks provide food for birds such as buffbreasts. Docks often grow in areas where soil has been disturbed or compacted. Building soil health and fertility around naturally help to reduce docks. The strong, deep taproot of docks (ever tried to pull one up?) in fact helps to build soil health: it breaks up areas of compacted soil and carries important nutrients back up to the surface where they can be reached by the shallower rooting grasses. Some farmers are happy to allow some docks in their pasture as a result. Cattle, sheep, goats, and deer (but not horses) will graze on docks in pasture, particularly in early spring, but docks can start to 'take over' on stags land where grazing does not occur. Regular cutting/topping and grazing before they go to seed will help to manage docks.
Thistles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thistles are beneficial to many species of wildlife: they provide an important nectar source for butterflies such as the meadow brown and an important source of seed for birds like the goldfinch, twite, linnet, siskin, and redpoll. They occur on almost all soil types but can often indicate clay soils that are nutrient-rich and deep and have reasonable water retention. Creeching thistles are perennials and spread by roots that 'creep' through the soil. Spear thistles are annuals/biennials and spread through seed. Prevention is better than cure – keep your soil covered and avoid overgrazing and poaching, both of which lead to gaps in the sward where thistles can gain a foothold. If you are overrun with thistles, a combined approach using good grazing practices and well-timed mechanical topping before they flower can help to reduce the burden over time.

NEW FARMING FOR NATURE AMBASSADORS ANNOUNCED

During the Burren Winterage Weekend, 12 new Farming for Nature Ambassadors received their award.

It takes bravery to put your head above the parapet, do things a little bit differently from your peers and act on other kinds of values. But that's what all of our ambassadors and nominees have done. Farming for Nature is delighted they are willing to come on board and share their stories and expertise with us and the wider farming community. You can read more about them and watch a short video about each of their farms [here](#).



MICHAEL HICKEY HEDGEROW AWARD



Michael Hickey was in one of the first cohorts of Farming for Nature Ambassadors who sadly passed away earlier this year.

His wife Ute graciously permitted us to create a new award in his memory. This award was presented to Pat Maher from Co. Tipperary for the outstanding condition of his hedgerows.



MEET OUR NEW AMBASSADORS

Each of our new ambassadors will partake in an online Q&A session with project manager Brigid. November's session was with derogation dairy farmer's Shane Fitzgerald and Kate Curran. You can listen back to their discussion [here](#).

Next up will be Lisa Fingleton and Rena Blake to discuss their eco-social farm on Tues 10th December at 8pm. Followed by Tom & Michael Keane on Tues 14th January who will be chatting about their love of rare-breeds and how they manage them for conservation grazing.

Follow us:



FARMING FOR NATURE GATHERING

Farming for Nature held a series of events during the Burren Winterage Weekend, as well as the awards.



Dr. Brendan Dunford led us on a fascinating Burren Farm Walk encompassing everything from the geography to the anthropology of this unique region.

We heard from two expert panels of Farming for Nature Ambassadors in Kinvara Community Centre. Thanks to Gearóid, Ken & Nigel for sharing their strategies to adapting to climate change. Also to Lisa, Clive, Ailbhe & Stephen for giving us insights into how they approach creativity on their farms. They were ably moderated by our chairs, journalist and farmer Hannah Quinn Mulligan and ATU's Dr. James Moran.

Thanks too to all the farming Ambassadors that spoke to fellow farmers at the annual Cattle Drive - Andrew, Aonghus, Colm, Jim, Nigel, Bryan & Tommy despite the very wet conditions.

A big thank you to journalist Ella McSweeney for volunteering her time to present the awards, which added a certain je ne sais quoi to proceedings.

A huge thank you also to Áine and Karen and all from the BurrenBeo Team for helping us set up and set down, Ciara from SIAR Kinvara for providing incredible meals and Paul Mulligan and Jack Talty for their audiovisual assistance.

THIS YEAR'S FARM WALKS CONCLUDES

This year's Farm Walk Series recently concluded on Tom Tierney's farm near Prosperous, Co. Kildare. It was a phenomenal season of farm walks with 26 completed all over the country, from Inch Island off the North of Donegal to Gleann na nGealt on the Dingle Peninsula. It was a record-breaking year for us with over 500 people attending walks on a wide range of topics from our intensive dairying series to stacking enterprises on small holdings. There will be another chance to catch the aforementioned Tom Tierney's walk as RTÉ's Nationwide were filming on the day. So keep your eyes peeled for that in the coming months!



THE HORSE'S MOUTH

The Horse's Mouth is our farmer-to-farmer peer mentorship program. This year 23 Farming for Nature Ambassadors/Mentors made 50 visits to applicants all over the country. The mentors are there to make observations about what can be done for nature on the land. These can be big or small or anything in between. Here is some of the feedback from this year's participants:

'I'm very grateful that he got the opportunity to visit the farm and give me some guidance on farming with nature. I found it really helpful and inspiring.'

Gary, Roscommon

'The fact that there is no judgement, as it is peer to peer, it didn't feel like an inspection.'

Melissa, Clare



Look out for the next round of funded mentorship sessions next Spring/Summer.

NEW RESOURCES

What Jim Cronin doesn't know about growing, isn't worth knowing. Lucky for you if you've ever struggled with making your own compost or would like to know why you should, check out this instructional video that Jim made for Farming for Nature. It's proving popular! Watch [here](#)

We also held a webinar series recently covering everything from soil health to agroforestry. Watch [here](#)



EARTH RISING

In September, Ambassadors Kate, Andrew & Bruce participated in a panel discussion with Network & Outreach Officer Sarah at the Earth Rising Festival. This was a food-focused hub being held at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Prior to the talk, in collaboration with curator Jennie Moran, we developed a Farming for Nature boardgame for the general public to participate in where they experienced the ups and downs of a farming year.



THE HARE'S CORNER



As we write, 20 new ponds are under construction on farms across the nation under the Hare's Corner program. Funded by Farming for Nature, these are practical actions taken for nature, like digging out a pond.

We heard from Siobhán in Co. Wicklow who took her Hare's Corner funding a step further than most and created a lake! Conservation and regeneration are the guiding principles on Siobhán's farm. The farm is generally wet with the River Derry running through it and the field that had a pond installed holds water particularly well.

The funding isn't just about providing money for a project. It also comes with advice from Feidhlim Harty, a wetlands expert. In Siobhán's case, he then helped with the design of the pond right down to instructions to give the diggerman when it came to construction.

Siobhán says 'I've been spending so much time by the pond since it was constructed. It is an incredibly beautiful, calming and enriching place to spend time. I've even bought a stand-up paddleboard to get on the water and to get across to the islands if I need to. '

The topsoil around the pond is gently coming to life with the latent seed bed starting to germinate in the mild Autumn weather. She is excited to see the vegetation growth next Spring and in the next 12 months. Siobhán lives in an area with wetland bird species. and counting down the days until they move in.

Thanks to Siobhán for sharing her story with us and for taking part in the Hare's Corner program.

SUPPORT US

If you'd like to join the movement of empowering farmers to farm for nature, then you can help!

Individuals and companies can help fund our work and help deliver concrete actions for nature conservation.

For more information, go to our [website](#)



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