

Basildon: January 2014

Subject: Irish farmer's success at European Congress of Young Farmers

## Irish success at 2<sup>nd</sup> EPP European Congress of Young Farmers



Sean Coughlan, 34, from Co. Mayo in Ireland has been awarded a Diploma for a sustainable/innovative project which he has implemented on his farm at Lahardans, Ballina. The award was made by Mairead McGuinness MEP and Matthew Foster, the Irish-born Vice President of Case IH and Steyr, at the 2014 European Young Farmers (EPP) Congress in Brussels, which gathered together more than 300 young farmers from 19 Member States to share their experiences and good practices. Organised by the European People's Party (EPP) and sponsored by Case IH, the event highlighted the role of young farmers in ensuring the future supply of food, feed and fibre production, for life in rural areas and for societies in Europe.

When Sean began farming with 22 beef cows and 200 Blackface Mountain ewes the 33ha of lowland on his 103ha farm produced just five tonnes of grass drymatter per hectare. Situated between the Nephin Beg Range of mountains and Lough Conn on the West Coast of Ireland, the farm comprises land which is peaty in nature due to an average annual rainfall of 1600mm-2000mm and is situated from 20m to 800m above sea level, although a temperate climate prevails. The farm is part of a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Sean's proposal focused on 'Profitable Beef and Lamb Production from Sustainable Grasslands', its objective being to develop production from his beef and lamb enterprises for local and international markets based on improving sustainable grass production. He started to develop the concept in May 2006 and began implementing it in July 2007, the project involving a €25,000 investment in reseedling and grassland improvement, €70,000 on livestock purchases and €55,000 to upgrade buildings, which was supported by Installation Aid.

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In 2007 he reseeded 15ha and constructed winter housing facilities, the following year better quality cows were purchased and a further 18ha reseeded, while waste management facilities were constructed in 2009. A year later he began to measure and manage the grassland to better effect, stocking rates were increased in 2011, better grazing management introduced in 2012 and last year sustainable grass production on the lowland reached 11.5 t/ha of drymatter.

The investment has increased farm revenues by 300%, enabling Sean to live full time in the area and look forward to the prospect of earning a living from the farm for the next 30 years, thus helping to encourage a more sustainable community in this beautiful, but rugged part of Ireland.

The project has also generated significant environmental benefits. The specialisation in sustainable, high-production grassland is underpinned by the inclusion of white clover in the grass sward, which greatly reduces the need for inorganic nitrogen fertiliser and the potential for ground water pollution.

“My region is in a very special natural environment where the climate is suited to growing high volumes of grass,” Sean explains. “I have exploited this to meet the needs of local and European consumers who want their food produced in a sustainable way with little impact on the environment. Ireland’s beef and lamb is already produced in one of the lowest carbon output systems in Europe and my target is to be in the Top 20 per cent of Irish farms. The key benefit of the concept which I developed is that it shows others that it is possible to farm profitably, yet sustainably by implementing the best knowledge relating to grassland management and livestock production.”

Speaking at the Congress, Matthew Foster stated: “We are proud to be involved in this important event. By supporting it we clearly illustrate our brands’ commitment to agriculture in general and young farmers in particular. The impressive entries show what young farmers are willing and able to do, so I hope that the messages from this event will be loud and clear, with all the necessary steps being taken to secure their support.

“Farmers face three completely different but equally significant challenges: The need to increase world food, feed and fibre production, to become more efficient by producing more using less inputs, and to further reduce the environmental side-effects of agriculture as much as possible.

“Young farmers and their role in modern sustainable agriculture is a key issue, so we must enable them to fulfil their challenging tasks. They need, and deserve, our support, so industry must be prepared to provide the technical solutions to assist them. That is where we come into play. With machinery for precision farming, our sector offers farmers the solutions which they need to meet the demands of society today and tomorrow. We also need to make politicians and society aware of agricultural reality, of factors that may hamper necessary developments. At the same time, we must highlight achievements and positive examples, which is exactly what we had in mind when we decided to support the Young Farmers Congress 2014 and reward the best, most innovative, most sustainable projects of young farmers.”

More information is available at [www.caseih.com](http://www.caseih.com).

**ENDS**

## NOTES TO EDITORS

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**Sean Coughlan is pictured (centre) with Irish Project MEP Mairead McGuinness and Matthew Foster, Vice President of Case IH and Steyr**