

## **Kettyle Family Farm, Co Fermanagh**

Robert Kettyle's father bought the home farm in 1959 and includes an island in Upper Lough Erne (Dernish Island) which accounts for almost 50% of the grazing area. The farm is 138 ha in total of predominantly organic soils over clay or peat soils over clay and is classified as severely disadvantaged (SDA). Average annual rainfall is over 100cm and combined with the soil type presents a real challenge to achieve good grassland performance. The island that is farmed has been designated as an Area of Significant Scientific Interest, a Special Area of Conservation, a Special Protection Area and it is part of a RAMSAR site.

Robert established a suckler herd in 1993 with Charolais as the main terminal sire but more recently Aberdeen Angus sires have been used on the Simmental X cows. Herd fertility has improved since starting to use AA sires and the calving index for 2020 was 371 days. A Simmental stock bull is used to breed replacements which calve down at 24 months. Eighty percent of the cows calve from February to May with the remainder calving in September. Robert markets his AA heifers and steers through Linden Foods who supply M&S. Cattle are slaughtered on average at 27 months old with heifers and steers averaging 325 kg and 350kg deadweight. Most achieve U and R grades with a small number grading O+. AA cattle attract a 20 p/kg bonus on normal beef price.

Robert places a lot of emphasises on producing quality grass for grazing and silage. He operates a rotational grazing system for the sucklers on the home farm for most of the grazing season.

Recently cow numbers have been reduced from 125 to 90 and a dairy origin-beef enterprise has been introduced. The dairy-origin calves are paddock grazed. The farm targets making first cut silage by the third week of May and this quality silage has allowed reduced concentrate feed rates to the finishing cattle.

Agri-environment management is an important aspect of the farm business. The farm is currently participating in the Higher Level of the DAERA Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS). Dernish Island is managed in line with the EFS Site Specific Remedial Management Plan which details the favourable management required for the internationally recognised habitats on the island. Habitats managed under the Scheme include purple moorgrass and rush pasture, breeding wader grassland and grazed ash woodland. In addition, rush control has been undertaken.

Robert has participated in several agri-environment schemes from their inception including the Countryside Management Scheme (which included 900m hedge and tree planting), the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme and the Management of Sensitive Sites scheme.

In addition to habitat management and enhancement, Robert has completed regular soil sampling and Nutrient Management Planning, ensuring the efficient and effective use of nutrients. Over the years enhanced facilities on the farm has included the construction of additional slurry storage thus minimising the risk of farm pollution and protecting water quality.

Both Dernish Island and the home farm include archaeological features identified as raths dating from the early Christian period.

Robert's aim is to build farm resilience by reducing input costs using quality forage. He also focuses on optimise labour efficiency on the farm through the farm infrastructure, livestock housing and handling facilities. The farm is managed by himself and a part-time farm worker and through good forward planning, provides off-farm time for family and Ulster Rugby!