

(Farming in)
IRELAND

One month placement in Irland
(Erasmus)

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Farming

In Ireland

Farming in Ireland began with the domestication of goats, sheep, cattle, pigs, and the cultivation of a primitive form of wheat and barley.

The first farmers cleared the forests of oak and elm trees to plant crops and allow their animals to graze.

Farmers favoured sheltered places near water sources. Farming slowly became the dominant way of life in Ireland.

1760-1810

Ireland is basically agrarian but

- the woollen industry was taxed out of existence

- the linen industry's development was controlled by England

Agriculture was dominated by small, family farms, often inefficiently run, and it was under-capitalised so there was little machinery. The farmers barely scraped a living, and root diets were the norm. Then came population growth and the demand for land grew. Some absentee landlords increased the rent and many peasants couldn't pay. There was little land reform, and due to sheep farming

fewer workers were needed.

Dependence on the potato increased.

Often the soil was inferior, distance from the ports to export was great, and then the weather conditions often led



to famine. The potato reached Ireland in the 16th century and changed the nations diet forever. It grew well in the damp climate and soon became the main food of the growing population. Farms grew potatoes and grain the next year. When the potato crops failed from 1845-1849 poor Irish farmers had no extra resources to feed the family. The potatoes once dug , turned black and slimy. The reason was a fungus that had travelled from Mexico to Ireland. An estimated four million people died during the famine, and a million or more emigrated. This famine left a long lasting feeling of bitterness towards the British government for protecting the price of grain, which made it too expensive for the Irish to buy. This was known as the Great Famine (Gorta Mōr).

This famine changed Ireland's political, demographic and cultural landscape, producing million of refugees. Today many folk songs such as „The Famine Song“ or „The Fields of Athenry“ demonstrate this, „The Potatoes they grow small“ remind us of this time. Many Americans have their roots in Ireland as their ancestors left in search of countries offering a better life.

1900-20-

In 1900 rural Ireland was synonymous with poverty but by 2000 Irish agriculture was synonymous with progress. Driving this revolution were the farmers, but also organisations such as IFA (Irish Farmers' Associations) and ICMSA (Irish Creamery and Milk Supplies Association) which were founded at the beginning of the 20th Century. Ireland also began attracting advisors to work with the farmers to develop rural Ireland.

Farming nowadays

Over the centuries Irish farmers have had to be flexible to deal with all the necessary changes: the impact of the weather, wars, revolutions and economic problems. Then came the technical changes: the arrival of the tractor, mowing machine and milking parlour, the change from street fairs to livestock markets and new technologies such as robotic milking and internet tools.

But they are now facing challenging issues to do with climate change, drought, heatwaves, storms and warming oceans. Ireland has set targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050. Farmers are already taking many steps to make their farms more sustainable and more carbon neutral. Ireland needs to reduce the size of its national cattle herd to lower methane emissions or to introduce changes methods of farming and new technologies. The Irish dairy industry has been the fastest growing dairy sector in the EU over the last 10 years, but there is growing environmental pressure concerning emissions, water quality and biodiversity loss. Farmers must find a way to minimise the impact on climate change, water, soil and air quality, not to forget biodiversity.

My duties on the farm/ in the family

I lived with the family for almost a month. My responsibilities started with light domestic duties to milking the cows. So on working days i woke up at six o clock and gmyself ready for milking. I wore a raincoat, some rain pants, wellies and long plastic gloves. The milking process was always different and dependent on the behaviour of the cows. As a result the period of





the the process took also differed form time to time but it would normally take about two hours to milk all the cows. I always started the machines, while the farmer would bring in all the cows down from the fields. When they had all arrived the main part began. There were two sides where the cows could get milked and with the help of a gate the farmer could regulate how many cows could entered at one time.

When all the cows were inside we would start cleaning the teat and attach the machine onto them. When the cow no longer supplied milk the machine would just drop off and we could take it to the next cow.

For me, this experience was very interesting and I have learned a lot.

Besides helping on the farm I also assisted in the house with the five children, checking homework, playing games and bringing them to bed.



My experience with farming

Ireland is definitely famous for farming, and that is also very obvious, especially when you look at the rural areas. The majority of farms in Ireland are family run. They have been handed down from generation to generation. Therefore it is also very typical, that farming families have more than 3 children, so one of them can take over the running of the farm one day.

Farms in Ireland are often very small but nevertheless, they make good profits, because Ireland exports a lot of dairy products. But nowadays there are also numerous farmers , especially owners of smaller farms who are struggling, because

the land has become extremely expensive, which prevents them from buying land and enlarging their business.

There are many things farmers have to keep in their minds, e.g. there are many new rules the government made, forcing farmers to become more green in their farming. These rules are putting a lot of farmers under pressure, because for them this can mean big changes which are often not easy to handle. For example, farmers are forbidden to put a special kind of pesticide on the fields, as it supposedly pollutes soil and water. However many farmers utilised these pesticides and fertilisers, so now they have to find an other solution and this can be a big struggle.

Farmers carry a lot of responsibility with them, not just only in Ireland but everywhere. Farmers are perpetrators and victims of the climate change and producing emissions. They have the power to change these issues in both directions, but often the right choice is not the easiest one because the existence of entire families is at stake.

Cork

County Cork - Contai Chorcai

County cork is the largest and southernmost county in Ireland. The region is well known for challenging authority and has a history of rebellion dating back to the 9th century.

The landscape is interesting and diverse, with both a mountainous and flat landscape with many beaches and cliffs along the coast. There are east/west ridges forming uplands and hills, while the farmland climbs as high as 245 metres to line the valleys of the east flowing rivers: Blackwater, Lee, Bandon and Bride.

A mild climate and good rainfall are ideal for the hundreds of family-owned farms, mainly beef and dairy farming. The importance of dairy farming is mentioned in early Irish law (Brehon Laws).

Whiskey originates from the Gaelic “Uisce Beatha” or “Water of Life”. Today there are over 40 distilleries in Ireland, while dairy products and Whiskey come together in County Cork where “Five Farms Irish Cream” is produced, a Whiskey-cream liqueur. The Irish write whiskey with an added e.



Local industries include the computer company “Dell”, “Dairy gold”, the milk and butter producer, and the European headquarters of “Apple”, the software computer company.

Cork - Corcaigh

The name means Marshland and it is positioned between 2 channels of the River Lee which then meet and lead to Lough Mahon and Cork Harbour, one of the biggest natural harbours in the world.

Cork was originally a monastic settlement and became more organised when vikings settlers founded a trading port. Later the city was once fully walled and some gates or wall sections remain today.

The medieval population was halved when the Black Death killed them.

Since the 19th century Cork had been a very nationalistic city supporting Irish Home Independence . In the War of Independence the much of Cork was burnt down by the British Black and Tans (the Burning of Cork).

Today it is a vibrant, compact and friendly town, very laidback but rich in food traditions, and maritime history and a thick countryside accent.

Organic farming

Organic fertilisers

These provide all the nutrients to the plants and soils with low ecological impact. They are often made from plant or animal-based materials and are not toxic to humans.

Examples are: manure, seaweed, guano

The goal is to create foods of the highest quality, have high nutritional value and are. Free of chemicals.

Making cattle more sustainable

Cattle are the number one agriculture source of greenhouse gases worldwide as they digest grasses. Each year a single cow will belch out 220 pounds of methane. This is lower than carbon dioxide but 20 times more potent in warming the atmosphere. Better breeding, genetics and nutrition can improve this situation.

- Using 1% seaweed in the diet makes the cows less gassy. There are also other additives

- Drugs are being tested to reduce the methane produced
- Adding vegetables and oils to the diet can also help
- A diet rich in maize, barley and garlic can reduce the levels

If everybody in the EU became a demeterian by having the amount of meat and they eat would cut greenhouse gasses from agriculture by between 25% -40% !

Biological pest control in organic farming

This is an important part of organic farming, which aims to use natural methods without the use of synthetic chemicals.

Crop rotation

Can be used to reduce the buildup of pests in the soil by interrupting their life cycle.

Introducing natural enemies

Natural predators re introduced to feed on pests, such as ladybirds to control aphids, while wasps are used for caterpillars.

Trap crops

These crops which attract pests can be planted to attract the insects away from the main crop.

Landscape ecology

This can help farmers to create a more diverse landscape which increases biodiversity and can boost the ecosystem

Bio pesticides

These are compounds made from natural resources and are better for the environment than normal pesticides.

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