



RECORD

Spring 2004



***Bursary winners***  
***Health and Safety***

**Focus on  
Careers**

## New Careers Centre

The ASA is presently compiling an employers' register of Agricultural Science Graduates and will be in direct contact with all employers to offer them the opportunity to place positions within their companies on the 'virtual' Careers Centre. This service will initially be offered free of charge to all employers.

Due to the continuing changes in every facet of the industry, employers are aware of the increasing need for highly skilled, specialist staff, capable of operating in a market where the consumers themselves are increasingly specialised. The issue for employers has been how to directly connect with these specialists. With nine areas of specialisation now available within the Agricultural Science degree programme and up to 38 per cent of graduates undertaking further postgraduate study, Agricultural Science graduates are positioned to fulfill a wide range of roles in both the public and private sector. The 'virtual' careers centre will offer employers a one-

stop shop for notifying all suitably qualified graduates of specific job opportunities.

For graduates, the careers centre will offer one 'notice board' where all positions arising within the sector will be displayed. Fully signed up members will be notified by email of positions as they arise.

Council members have compiled a list of all the potential employers of Agricultural graduates – those offering services directly to farmers and those indirectly involved in agribusiness. They are being reminded of the several skills and talents of graduates of the agricultural faculty. They will be asked to advertise available jobs through the ASA jobs centre. In this way, all members who are seeking jobs will be informed of the opportunities.

The ASA is grateful for the full commitment of all employers in helping to get this unique initiative off the ground successfully. We expect that the service will be available to graduates from mid-summer onwards.

## Careers seminar

The association is in the process of organising a careers seminar for agricultural graduates for the autumn. The council is mindful of its role in promoting ag graduates as potential employees but is also aware that graduates of other faculties are competing successfully for jobs that were exclusively reserved for ag graduates in the past. Of course, successful competition for available positions depends not only on the quality of the degree but also on the preparation for the jobs market. The seminar will aim to give graduates a

better insight into what is required to prepare to compete successfully for available jobs.

The seminar will be aimed at new graduates and those who are completing studies for higher degrees. It will consist of talks on the preparation of curriculum vitae, preparation for the job interview and some hints and tips will be provided on how to make a positive impression during the interview itself. A number of potential employers will also attend the seminar and will be available to meet potential employees.



Pat O'Mara of AIB presenting Jane Hourihan with her prize.

## Mock Interviews at UCD

During February, a number of ASA members facilitated UCD final year students in organising mock job interviews in association with their careers day. In all about 76 out of the 198 final year students availed of the facility. This was a much lower level of participation than previous years. A total of 14 members acted as interviewers working in teams of two. Each of the six top performing interviewees received a cash prize sponsored by AIB. The winners were: Adam Woods, Edward Young, Eimear McGettrick, Jane Hourihan, Martina Moloney, Sinead Mulcahy.

The feedback from the interviewers was that there were some exceptional performances from participants who were well prepared – there might even be some job offers. Some of the students who participated considered it a worthwhile exercise with some valuable lessons being learned about interview preparation.

The ASA want to thank in particular the AIB who sponsored the prizes, also Terence Morrissey and John O'Donovan (both Council members) who spent considerable time in assisting with the preparation.

## Policy representations to Government

In recent months, there have been significant discussions on major policy changes that will affect the future of Irish farmers. The nitrates directive could limit the production potential of our most efficient producers, while restricting the availability of animal medicines to being prescription only could increase costs for farmers and have animal welfare implications. The association is concerned that the best possible outcome for Irish agriculture is achieved in relation to both these issues. The submissions made are summarised here.

### Nitrates

This submission was prepared after much consultation within the association. The main thrust of our proposal to the Department of the Environment is that any restrictions on the use of nitrogen must be based on a scientific analysis - that is it is not useful to place blanket restrictions on producers based on their location. The ASA is of the view that proper scientific based management of organic wastes will prevent losses of valuable nutrient to the environment.

The association agrees that the Nitrates Action Programme should set down minimum legal requirements for the whole country and that there should be a closed period between November 1 and January 15 for the land spreading of organic fertilisers. However, the closed period could be varied depending on scientific evaluation of soil type and grass growth patterns and where land spreading is allowed in a closed period, it would be restricted to a maximum hydraulic loading of 15 cubic meters per hectare.

The application of chemical fertilisers should be on the basis of Teagasc recommendations with account being taken of weather

conditions. The ASA also takes the view that a buffer strip of 10 meters is sufficient for river channels, 20 meters is sufficient for lakes and restrictions in relation to public water supplies should be on a case-by-case basis, taking topography and soil type into account.

In relation to the maximum level of organic nitrogen the association believes that it should be set at 210kg and that derogations should be available



Good management of organic waste can prevent losses to the environment even at high stocking rates.

based on nutrient management plans prepared by qualified agriculturalists. This is considered feasible in the Irish context based the climatic conditions for grass growth.

The ASA would like to see the

Department of Agriculture and Food as the competent authority for registrations and that there should be full integration with cross compliance requirements with no duplication of checks in relation to the nitrates directive.

## Prescription only medicines

This submission, made to the Department of Agriculture and Food, points out that the Agricultural Science Association is the representative organisation for all agricultural science graduates in Ireland and that members of the profession are employed across a wide spectrum of positions but mainly in the agricultural and food industries. Significant numbers work in the Department of Agriculture and also in the Teagasc advisory and research services. The private agricultural consultancy business is almost wholly run by agricultural scientists.

The purpose of this submission is to make interested parties aware of the qualifications which agricultural scientists have, which in the opinion of ASA qualifies the profession to write scripts for certain categories of veterinary medicinal products. It is our belief that the B.Agr.Sc degree qualification contains sufficient content to satisfy any relevant authority that graduates could carry out this responsibility.

The submission outlined the concerns of the ASA with regard to a number of issues arising



The use of animal medicines by farmers is a routine farm management practice that ensures the health and welfare of farm animals.

from the proposed revision of regulations governing prescription only medicines (POMs) as they relate to veterinary products.

Firstly, in pursuit of ensuring that medicines are properly used there is evidence that stricter controls have forced the industry underground. This is totally counterproductive.

Secondly, animal welfare issues could easily arise out of greater restriction in availability.

Reduced usage of preventative treatments could be the result. This would lead to increased disease resulting in stress to animals followed by the need for greater antibiotic use. We are all aware and concerned about reducing the use of antibiotics especially because of resistance issues.

Thirdly, there is the cost to the farmer. It should not be prohibitive for farmers to access preventative treatments. The current proposals will have the effect of increasing costs.

ASA considers that the use of preventative medicines such as anthelmintics and vaccines constitutes an integral part of good animal husbandry practice and as such B.Agr.Sc graduates on a daily basis are recommending best practise to farmers as it is.

The association requests that all interested parties consider the possibility of registering the B.Agr.Sc qualification as being a professional qualification suitable for writing scripts of farmers.

A list of the relevant courses taken by animal and crop production students in UCD has appended to the submission.



## The Bursary Winners

There were joint winners of the 2003 Annual Bursary. Anne Finnegan is a Walsh fellow Ph.D student in UCD and is carrying out research on the causes and consequences of farm accidents and the design of safety strategies. She used the bursary to attend a course on safety promotion research. The other joint winner was John McNamara who is the farm safety labour use specialist with Teagasc.



Bursary winner Anne Finnegan with course director, Lucie Laflamme, and course administrator, Marjan Vaez, and fellow students at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm.

## Research into farm safety

Anne Finnegan used the proceeds of the Bursary to attend the sixth international PhD course on safety promotion research at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm. The Bursary gave her the unique opportunity to attend and to bring back new information for her research programme.

On average one third of workplace fatalities in Ireland occur in farming. In 2001, 24 people, including seven children, lost their lives on Irish farms and a further 3,100 farm work related injuries occurred. These statistics highlight the need for effective farm safety interventions –which requires a clear understanding of safety research issues.

Accident situations are studied by many different disciplines: industrial engineering, psychology, occupational health and public health have all contributed to this area. Production agriculture has not been lacking - it too has developed a research approach to its occupational safety and health issues. This approach is guided by the concepts and principles from the above disciplines, particularly occupational safety and health. However, in recent times, public health has become more active and its principles are impacting on the production agriculture research approach. Public health employs the science of epidemiology as its cornerstone for understanding,

preventing and controlling occupational injury and illness.

### Injury as a public health problem

In accident and injury research, it is important to bear in mind that different areas of the world and different age groups of people have differential injury levels. When comparing international statistics, very often we neglect to acknowledge this concept. Often statistics are misinterpreted or perhaps not interpreted at all, merely viewed for what they are - figures. Looking behind injury figures and interpreting statistics in the context of social, economic, environmental and legislative backgrounds gives a greater understanding of the injury problem. How often do we read safety, accident or injury statistics with context in mind? When dealing with international data, national data and small questionnaire survey data, many quality issues arise. Under reporting of injuries is a common problem, one which has proved significant in Irish farm injury data. Recall issues are also a major

problem especially when dealing with survey data. Very often minor accidents or specific details of accidents cannot be recalled, which results in an incomplete picture of the accident problem. All of these issues have a significant affect on the results of a study, which in turn can impact on the type of intervention proposed.

### Injury causation, prevention and safety promotion

Defining concepts and explaining why injuries occur is fundamental to developing safety interventions. Causation is central to the accident concept; it implies that all accidents have a time dimension. An accident is not an unpredictable event occurring at a point in time. There is a sequence of events, which all too often result in injury. Accident models very effectively represent the accident sequence and clearly show that accidents are multi-causal. These models also show that there are options for prevention at different stages in the sequence. Three stages common to most models are: the environment, human activities (host)

and hazards (agent). Power take off (PTO) shafts and machine guards are good examples of prevention options that presented to engineers between the environment and human activities stages.

### Social differences in injury risks

Social differences play an important part in injury risk as they do in any manifestation of ill health. The mechanisms by which social context and social position influence injury occurrence are not well understood. However, agricultural safety research presents some evidence which suggests that education level and income level are related to farming accidents. Where social differences have an effect on injury risk, there are implications for intervention strategies. Very often, the social differences are the reason that those who are in most need of an intervention, do not receive it. Indicated or targeted rather than universal prevention and intervention programs allow us to reach those who are having accidents or are more likely to have accidents.

### Economic aspects of injury prevention and safety promotion

In the area of safety promotion, economics provide a framework for considering how efficiently programmes achieve their objectives and how resources can be used most cost effectively. Questions also arise

## Improving health and safety and the work environment

**John McNamara used the Bursary award to attend the Nordic Meeting on Agricultural Occupational Safety and Health and the International Symposium on Rural Economy, Healthy People and Rural Communities, which was held in Canada.**

here which ask: who pays for the financial cost of injuries? How much of this cost is the taxpayer willing to pay? On top of these it is reasonable to ask what farmers are willing to pay to prevent injuries on their own farms? These questions are rarely asked. Is it time that farmers were asked to reflect on their responsibility for the financial consequences of farm injuries?

### To conclude

The sequence of events that result in injury are fundamental to developing safety interventions. We need to know what the 'accident chain' is before we can break it.

Because accidents are multi-causal and much more than 'unpredictable events', prevention approaches must be multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary in order to be truly effective.

Social differences in injury risk require that interventions and prevention programmes be targeted to those most in need of them.

Safety promotion is a much broader concept than injury prevention; it aims to encompass motivational efforts at community level in order to prevent injuries. It is my opinion that the design of injury prevention strategies should involve the communities for which those strategies are intended. In doing this, programs can be realistically adopted, and participated in, by target groups.

One of the more interesting facts to emerge from the study is that many countries look beyond the issue of farm safety and accidents and look at the general health of rural populations. The issue of sustainability in agriculture and rural areas then emerges – health is likely to decline where agriculture is under pressure. As younger people move out in these situations, the elderly are left behind and consequently the general health of the population declines. An Australian researcher highlighted the importance of sustaining the economic and employment base of rural communities to prevent reduced health status differentials developing.

### Health issues

Quite a number of studies worldwide indicate that farmers suffer higher level of ill health than other occupational groups. These include conditions like osteoarthritis, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions. Worldwide farmers are low users of preventative health care. A medical check-up is provided automatically as part of Nordic occupational health and safety services to farmers.

In Ireland, a recent study found that farmers have a particularly negative health profile. Poor health is leading to considerable quality of life problems and disability among farmers. Regarding mental health, a recent study in Norway indicated that farming as an occupation is positive for well-being. However the three major causes of poor mental health are: financial problems, dangerous working conditions and ill health

### Impact of work load on health

A recent study of working conditions on dairy farms in Finland



ASA Bursary Winner John McNamara discusses Irish research on health and safety and disability with Genevieve Pickett, Agriculture and Agri-Food Directorate, ~ Extension Officer, University of Saskatchewan, Canada.

indicates that farmers work long hours doing excessively strenuous work. The study concluded that the major expansion in farm size likely to take place in the immediate future warrants urgent action to reduce workloads and improve lifestyles.

### Safety

Some progress was made in Ireland with improving safety levels on farms in the nineties. Research indicates that fatalities have dropped from 20 to 12 per 100k annual work units since the 'nineties. However, little progress has been made in recent years as the farm workforce dropped considerably and the number of accidents did not show a proportional decline. This trend has been observed in Nordic countries also. Farming now accounts for 30 per cent of all workforce fatalities in Ireland.

The USA has with 22 fatalities per 100k farmers. Safety legislation only applies in the US on farms with 11 or more employees, so most farmers are outside the legislative framework. Seventy five per cent of deaths occur with tractors and machinery, yet over half of the tractors have no rollover protection.

Finland, with six fatalities per 100k has possibly the lowest

accident rate in the world. This has been achieved by a strong positive culture towards safety and health, legislation and social insurance. Membership of the Farmers' Social Insurance Institution is compulsory and every farm must be examined for safety standards.

Considerable progress has been in recent years in Canada. They believe that progress is possible only if 'research, policy and practice' are integrated. Once new research information becomes available it is immediately implemented by working groups involving all the 'stakeholders'.

### Professional agriculturalists

A number studies indicate that farmers are responsive to health and safety, work environment and lifestyle messages. Thus, progress can be achieved cost effectively by getting the 'research, policy and practice' mix right. We agriculturalists are visiting farmers as advisors, consultants, inspectors, sales people, REPS planners and in other various different roles. All of us can make a contribution to improving farm safety by drawing the attention of farmers where hazards are spotted. Whatever the purpose of the farm visit health and safety should also be on our agenda.

## Urban Rural Week



At the launch of the ASA-INTO Urban Rural Week were (from left): Pauric Healy, Manager, Agri-Aware; Austin Corcoran, President INTO, Jeanne Prendergast Farmer Airfield Trust, Marion Rollins Education officer, Airfield Trust; John Grogan, President ASA; Royston Brady, Lord Mayor of Dublin and Sean Campbell, Urban Rural Week Co-ordinator for ASA.

## Council members go to schools

The 2004 Urban Rural Week programme will be held during the first week in May. This hugely successful ASA-run event has the support and back up of a new video and educational pack produced by Agri Aware during the spring of 2004. This pack is presently being distributed to all primary schools through out the country.

Since its inception over 20 years ago by the ASA, this nationwide

programme has given the opportunity for circa 75,000 primary school children who would have little or no contact with farms or farming, the chance to visit a working family farm to see first hand how Irish food is produced. In September 2003, special awards were given to Urban Rural Week host farmers and ASA county co-ordinators who gave exceptional long service to this programme over the years

ASA president John Grogan remarked: "This event provides an excellent opportunity for these children who are tomorrow's consumers to adopt a positive image of Irish food production".

The event was officially launched by Minister Joe Walsh during the month of April. The INTO placed advertisements in their magazine *In Touch* and teachers started contacting council members to arrange a visit their school and to

give the pupils first hand knowledge of what farming is about.

I would like to acknowledge the support of all council members who will be acting as county co-ordinators in 2004, Agri Aware and INTO who have always enthusiastically embraced this event as a very important educational tool for children from urban areas in relation to the critical role farming plays in the production of all the food we eat.

## AgriLink initiative

NIIAS, the Northern Ireland Institute of Agricultural Science, and ASA, combined under the aegis of AgriLink, have made an application to INTERREG for funding to conduct a pilot study into the reskilling of professional agriculturalists post CAP reform. The main aim is to develop a common computerised Personal Professional Development

Programme for members of NIIAS and ASA. The project title is "Reskilling professional agriculturalists post-CAP reform"

### Aims

1. Conduct an in-depth survey among professional agriculturalists working in Northern Ireland and the border counties to determine

their reskilling needs in view of CAP reform, cross compliance and environmental issues.

2. Develop and pilot a common cross-border Personal Development Programme (PDP) for NIIAS and ASA members in the border counties.
3. Develop a cross-Border computerised database to

host PDP and provide access to appropriate course material with particular emphasis on home-based e-learning and environmental information.

4. Identify and test ways that professional agriculturalists on both sides of the Border can improve communication with each other and share common experiences.

# Strategy development

As was reported in the last issue, the Council expended considerable effort during 2003 in carrying out a survey of members and of ag graduates who are not members of the organisation. The idea of the survey was to establish the views of members of how the organisation is performing on their behalf and for non-members to establish why they are not members.

Resulting from the survey, a strategy development committee has been appointed - which includes the president and vice-president. They have had a number of meetings and are looking in detail at the organisation, trying to

define its shape for the future. It is considered that given the changes that are taking place in Irish agriculture and the effect that these changes will have on ag graduates, a clear focus is required for the organisation in order to better represent the interests of members in the future. Of course, the strategy has to consider how to increase the membership and activity among younger graduates. The strategy will define a mission statement for the organisation - trying to focus the organisation on what it is that the ASA should be doing and will try to develop the methodology for continued success in the future.



Will there be gold at the end of the rainbow once the single farm payment is in place? The Council has been surveying members and non-members to plan a strategy for the future of the organisation.

## New Dean

The New Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture in UCD is Professor Maurice Boland. He takes over from Professor Joe Mannion who has completed three terms as Dean.

Maurice carried out his postgraduate research at UCD and in 1983 he was awarded a DSc based on his published work. He has spent time as a visiting professor at the University of California, Davis and as a visiting scientist at CSIRO, Prospect, NSW, Australia. But major part of career with the Faculty of Ag

He is well known for his pioneering work in animal

reproduction and has many years experience in lecturing and research at UCD and has lectured in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. He has served on many influential committees both within UCD, with Teagasc, the Department of Agriculture and Food, and with DEFRA and the Medical Research Council in the UK. He is a past President of the International Embryo Transfer Society.

From 1992 to 2001 he held the position of Head of the Department of Animal Science and was appointed Professor of Animal Husbandry in 1994. Currently on

the board of the Conway Institute of Biomolecular and Biomedical Research and the Dublin Molecular Medicine Centre, his research activities include extensive collaborative work with leading institutions both within Ireland and worldwide.

Professor Boland takes over during a period when the agri-food industry is facing many challenges that will shape and influence the teaching and research programmes of the Faculty. We wish him every success in his new position

Maurice is from Kilanerin, Gorey, Co.Wexford and is married with three daughters.



Professor Maurice Boland



## Golf

As usual there will be three golf outings this year for ASA members. The ASA captain's prize will be held in Tullamore Golf Club on June 17. The captain for this year is Paddy Horgan of ACCBank.

The ASA Inter-services Golf Outing will be held on September 2 also in Tullamore Golf Club. AIB Bank is providing very generous sponsorship for this year's event. The President's Prize will be held as usual in association with the Annual Conference in September.

## Message to Readers

In our next issue of the ASA Record will devote some space to "Letters to the Editor". So if you have some message to communicate to your fellow ASA members or view to express or an opinion to share here is an opportunity. You can send your letters directly to ASA, Irish farm Centre, Bluebell, Dublin 12 or by e-mail to [msasa@go.free.indigo.ie](mailto:msasa@go.free.indigo.ie)

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has extensive information of interest to  
agricultural professionals

## Diary Dates

### Annual Conference

The annual conference will be held on 9 and 10 of September in the Tower Hotel in Waterford.

### ASA Bursary - Call for Submissions

Once again, this year's bursary will be sponsored by AIB Bank. With funding of €6,500 it offers ag graduates a unique opportunity to travel anywhere in the world to study a topic of relevance to their work. Those submissions which demonstrate a relevance to the future ofagri-food and rural development are of particular interest. The Bursary is open to all paid up members who have some experience in a professional capacity at the date of application.

The application consists of an application form and a short submission of about 500 words. Now is the time to start thinking about your proposal, as a letter will issue shortly to all members inviting submissions. Once again, the submissions will be judged by eminent figures in the agricultural sector.