

Kerry sheep group target hotels in local lamb push

Declan O'Brien

KERRY sheep farmers are tackling falling margins head on, with a new producer group aiming to open up a range of outlets for local lamb.

The Ring of Kerry Lamb Marketing Group will be launched at the Malton Hotel, Killarney, today.

The producer group, which is supported by the South Kerry Development Partnership, will sell more than 2,500 lambs for around 40 producers, and has targeted several potential outlets for their stock.

One of the more high-profile markets will be the hotel sector. Twenty six top chefs from restaurants around the county will attend today's launch, where they will taste top-quality, locally produced lamb.

In addition, they will be able to examine samples of vacuum-packed lamb from the producer group.

Michael Gottstein, a local lamb producer and Teagasc sheep specialist, said the initial reaction of the chefs to the concept had been very positive.

He said the idea that restaurants would be able to sell local produce was of obvious benefit. However, he insisted that the county of origin label would not be the primary selling point for Ring of Kerry lamb.

He said the emphasis would be on delivering an excellent product on a consistent basis.

"This is all about guaranteeing quality and ensuring that customers do not have a bad taste experience. If a wrong type of lamb is sent to the factory then it won't be killed," he said.



TOP MAN: Timmy Fleming, chairman of the Ring of Kerry Lamb Marketing Group, with his flock of sheep EAMONN KEOGH/MACMONAGLE

However, the Teagasc man said that training would be provided to group members to help them choose the correct stock for slaughter and for sale.

All lambs will have to be castrated and tailed. In addition, lambs will not be allowed to be killed directly from the shed.

The producer group has entered into an agreement with a local butcher, who has been trained in innovative ways of

presenting lamb. Another farmer has bought a refrigerated van to deliver the produce to the group's customers.

The hotel market is not the only initiative being targeted by the Kerry farmers. They also plan to sell frozen lamb directly to consumers - what the group has termed the 'deep freeze market'.

In addition to special store lamb and replacement female sales, the producers plan to

organise light lamb sales, which will be aimed at building a live export trade.

The overall goal is to lift farmer profit to at least €20/ewe. "This is not a get rich quick scheme. What we are looking for is a fair price for our produce," Mr Gottstein said.

The producer group hopes to grow its membership and also to increase the number of lambs they market.

The producer group is headed up by former Kerry footballer and sheep farmer, Timmy Fleming.

Padraig Moran, the award-winning sheep producer and shearer from Waterville, is another of the better-known members of the group.

Anyone interested in joining can contact Timmy Fleming on 086 163 4681

In Brief

ICMSA call for ban on animal imports

THE ICMSA has called for a complete ban on animal importation to avoid a bluetongue (BT) outbreak.

Martin McMahon, ICMSA beef and cattle committee chairman, said all necessary precautions had to be taken to prevent the disease reaching Ireland.

"Given the present income and input pressures of Irish farmers, an outbreak of BT is the last thing Ireland needs and there is a responsibility on everyone to take every precaution necessary to keep BT out of Ireland," he said.

"The current warm period is ideal for the spread of BT, so this issue is now even more important."

The Co Clare livestock farmer pointed out that the ICMSA was fully supportive of Minister Smith's stance regarding the importation of livestock.

However, he said there was a glaring anomaly in EU regulations and the minister needed to seek changes to allow him to implement a ban where a significant risk of disease spread existed.

"It is absolutely ridiculous that, in 2009, the actions of a single person to import livestock have the potential to do enormous damage to our farm sector.

"Importing animals at this time is an act of madness and a betrayal of fellow farmers, and it must not happen," he added.

He said anyone importing stock was effectively putting the livelihoods of all Irish farmers at risk.

British farmers to face 'animal tax'

FARMERS in England could soon be paying a new 'animal tax' on cattle, sheep, goats, poultry and horses.

Revenue from the proposed new tax would be used to tackle animal health and disease prevention.

The proposed levy would see livestock owners paying £10.50 (€12.25)/horse, £4.80 (€5.60)/dairy cow and £1.20 (€1.40)/beef animal.

The levy for sheep would be 82p (95c)/sheep, while poultry and gamebirds would incur a tax of 4p (5c) each.

Livestock owners could also be forced to pay for compulsory insurance cover for compensation in the event of a disease outbreak.

Britain's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said the objective of sharing animal health and welfare responsibilities between industry and the government is to achieve better management of animal disease risks so that the overall risks and costs are reduced.

A review of the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001 recommended that the cost of controlling diseases should fall more on livestock keepers.

However, British farmers have reacted furiously to the proposal, with the National Farmers Union accusing the government of piling on the agony by burdening farmers

US Senate probe finds six traders held 60pc of all wheat contracts

SIX commodity traders held more than half of all outstanding wheat contracts traded on the crucial Chicago Mercantile Exchange at one point during 2008, a US senate investigation has found.

Global wheat prices surged during 2007 and early 2008 as a result of massive speculation by index traders.

As a consequence, daily outstanding contracts on the Chicago exchange increased from 30,000 in 2004 to 220,000 by mid-2008.

At one stage, the six index traders held almost 130,000 wheat futures contracts. These were equivalent to 60pc of all outstanding wheat contracts held by index traders.

Excessive speculation on wheat futures markets created unwarranted costs and risk for farmers, merchants, processors

and consumers, the senate investigation noted.

The trading created losers throughout the wheat industry, from farmers to grain merchants, grain processors, and grain users, such as bakeries and cereal companies.

The report accused federal regulators of failing to take the steps needed to protect the market.

The Chicago Futures Trading Commission, the body charged with preventing excessive futures market speculation, has issued several exemptions for futures traders since 2005, allowing dealers to hold more than the 6,500-contract limit.

"It is another case of speculative money overwhelming a market," the committee chairman said.

Caitriona Murphy



AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY



Sheep Walks July 2009

Teagasc invites all interested to a nationwide series of upcoming sheep farm walks commencing Wednesday, 8 July and focusing on Maximising Lamb Performance after Weaning.

Wed 8 July	Kildare	Bernie Connell, Cloncurry, Rathangan	2:00pm
Mon 13 July	Dublin	Padraic McMahon, Kilsallaghan	7:00pm
Tues 14 July	Limerick	Michael Power, Cappagh, Askeaton	7:00pm
Wed 15 July	Meath	Michael & Ronan Delany, Gaulstown, Dunshaughlin	7:00pm
Thurs 16 July	Meath	Patrick Caffrey, Coghalstown, Wilkinstown, Navan	7:00pm
Thurs 16 July	Mayo	Tom Staunton, Shanvalleyard, Tourmakeady	7:00pm
Tues 21 July	Sligo	Richard Woodmartin, Woodville	7:30pm
Tues 21 July	Kerry	Michael Begley, Cullinagh, Dingle	7:30pm
Thurs 23 July	Longford	Kevin Farrell, Coroboha, Ballymahon	5:00pm
Tues 28 July	Kilkenny	Teagasc, Kildalton College, Piltown	2:30pm
Thurs 30 July	Cork	Sean & Collette Dennehy, Shandangan East, Carrigadrohid	7:30pm
Fri 31 July	Louth	Anthony McShane, Rooskey, Carlingford	7:00pm
Thurs 20 August	Donegal	William Duffy, Ballymagowan, Kerrykeel	7:00pm



For further information:
see www.teagasc.ie
or email: michael.p.mchugh@teagasc.ie