

The Water Supply Challenge

The past month to six weeks has seen Ireland experience its hottest and driest weather since the summer of 1976. And the only sprinkle of rain we'd seen anywhere prior to the weekend was on a drive to Dublin last week, which barely constituted what we constitute as 'a drop'.



While gardeners may be justly concerned about their own plots, farmers' concerns about maintaining and indeed saving their crops are thoroughly justified. According to ICMSA President Pat McCormack, a co-ordinated response is now required "from all stakeholders in the industry to ensure that farmers can get through what is already an extremely difficult and stressful period for them". Some farmers in mid-Waterford and South Kilkenny are drawing water into slurry tanks and using it on dry grassland, giving it a much needed boost. Some farmers may also need some working capital to get through this period.

Said Mr McCormack: "Irish Water will have to make water available to farmers where required. In addition, other relevant state agencies must facilitate farmers in securing water supplies where required." A rise in food prices may follow later in the year should this dry spell continue but time alone will reveal all on that front. As Waterford IFA Chairperson Kevin Kiersey told us last week: "Other areas of the country have had at least some bit of rain - we've had nothing for weeks." The poor autumn and winter followed by the spring snows and this heat wave has left farmers wondering when they're going to get a break, with two different fodder problems arising inside just four months.

Waterford farmers, Mr Kiersey added, have been left playing the "waiting game" in relation to rainfall, which is something we now need a lot of for a sustained period of time. Householders need to act responsibly for the foreseeable future, and if this means turning the tap on less, having short showers, flushing the toilet less frequently and maybe paying a trip to the local well to bottle water for your evening cuppa, then so be it. The likelihood is that if the dry spell continues, there will be notable night time interruptions in supply - something which has already come into place in some parts of the country.

In general, the Waterford area is well served thanks to the level of investment in the water supply provided via the new waste water treatment plant near Belview. With that in mind, and looking towards the future, harvesting rainwater for emergencies is surely something more of us should be doing, heat wave or no heat wave: be it via a big barrel in the garden or a churn, for example, we should have such a reserve if we want to be in a position to keep flushing the toilet. The time may well have come for a major public information campaign when it comes to harvesting and conservation, a 'rainy day' measure, to mix the metaphor.

The absence of a water charge undoubtedly means that bad habits will well persist among many for some time to come. Aquifers on farms may well have to be introduced and one sees no option but to pipe the Shannon region to supply Dublin and the East with water - it's a forward thinking measure. As we referenced last week, we must plan for the future as climate change would appear to be already here.