

# SOBAC TO BASICS



We spoke with Galway farmer Sean McDermott to discover more about the impact of Sobac's range of soil-improving products on his dairy farm.

ORIGINALLY FROM LONGFORD, Sean McDermott has farmed around 100 acres near Eyrecourt in Co. Galway for the past 11 years. A dairy farmer, Sean has 180 cattle on the farm in total, and will be milking around 100 cows next year. His wife and four kids make up the rest of the farm's human population. "The land is fairly good up here, but when it rains, it will get sticky quite quickly – it doesn't soak away that fast. But it isn't that bad either," Sean explains.

Sean took over operations here around 11 years ago, when the land was being used for tillage. Moving into sheep and sucklers, he ordered a soil sample to discover more about the quality of the land. "The Ps and Ks were non-existent on the farm," he recalls. The Ks in particular were on the floor – the tester said he'd never seen a reading as low before. We needed to spread a tonne of lime to the acre."

## RECOVERY

Farmers are often reminded about good grassland management, but good soil management is also key. Dairy farms have a high nutrient requirement and so farmers should opt for optimum nutrient content in their soil. Sean's ground has

undergone a recovery process over the past decade. As the years passed he began to see improvements, and his recovery method decreased to the spreading of a bag of 0730 fertiliser at the start of the year, and a bag at the end. Three years ago, however, he stopped, coinciding with his first use of SOBAC's Bacteriosol pellets. The French company first introduced this concept to Ireland during the Tullamore show in 2012 and has since completed successful trials. The basic concept behind SOBAC's products is the creation of humus – a point of stability where organic matter won't break down in the soil any further. As a result, micro-organism levels increase and the humus retains elements such as nutrients to improve soil structure and fertility. Bacteriosol is a pellet spread directly on the ground, while Bacteriolit is a powder which can be added to farmyard manure or slurry.

Sean first heard about these products at a farmers' meeting in Loughrea, and decided to try it for himself. "I thought that if I did half of what the sales rep said, it would be great stuff," he recalls with a laugh. To begin with Sean spread pellets on receded ground following a silage cut, and left the ground for two to three

weeks. The difference in the second silage cut was only seven bales. Happy with this result, he spread three tonnes of pellets on his grazing block and then later added another half tonne to his slurry supply and treated the remaining paddocks. There's no doubting his happiness with the results over the past three years. "We found it very good and as the years go on, we are finding more of a response to the treatment. I haven't spread lime on the home block for three years, no Ps and Ks, none at all," he explains. "On the grazing side of the farm, we got about 3-4 grazings from our paddocks where we would have had two beforehand. Three weeks after one grazing there was 2,500kg cover."

Sean was among the first from his local group to take on SOBAC and reap the benefits, and he urges his fellow farmers to try the product, and to come and see the results for themselves. "There's only one way you'll see if it's going to work or not – go and look at a farm that's using it," he says flatly. "I've no problem opening the gates here for any man who wants to have a look. There's a lot of people who might think I'm mad, but it's working for me. The farm is blooming," Sean concludes.