

# SHARED PASSION, BETTER FUTURE

# Interested in scaling up, stepping back or switching enterprise?

The new Macra land mobility service will help farmers and land owners with compatible goals to work together in different farming arrangements, writes Paidi Kelly

**A**ustin Finn has just begun his new job as Macra's land mobility programme manager and his main objective is to help farmers and land owners to work together to find more beneficial farming arrangements. The need for such a person was identified in the Macra Land Mobility and Succession in Ireland report last year. Austin is employed by Macra and his position is mainly funded by the FBD Trust.

The trust saw huge benefits for Irish farming in employing a person with both a good farming and business understanding who could help farmers to consider their options in terms of new farming arrangements.

Austin farms part time himself in Ballyfoyle, Kilkenny, and has an accounting background so he understands both the financial and personal side of farming. The service he is offering farmers is entitled the Land Mobility Service.



Austin explained to me what this entails: "My aim is to provide information on alternative arrangements which

would be more beneficial for farmers to operate. I will work with individuals of all ages to explore options with potential for them. For a younger farmer, this may be looking for some form of farming arrangement to help them grow their business. For an older farmer, it might be a way of reducing the workload. I will act as an independent broker between two people or parties who are considering entering some kind of new farming arrangement."

Initially, Austin will be offering the service in three pilot areas around Roscommon, Kilkenny and Cork. He plans to build on the good work done by Teagasc in the area of collaboration and will work closely with them.

He said: "I will work with a farmer's adviser to help find an arrangement for their client. This service isn't about reinventing the wheel; it's

## AT A GLANCE

- ➲ Austin Finn is running the Macra land mobility service which will help put compatible farmers in contact and set up new farming arrangements.
- ➲ Initially, pilot areas will be in Roscommon, Kilkenny and Cork but Austin wishes to hear from interested farmers and land owners in all locations.
- ➲ Every arrangement must deliver a number of things, e.g. title security and income security.



about helping people see the potential benefits of the arrangements that are already in place. There are plenty of people using these already but overall their uptake in Ireland has been slow."

### Best fit

What's new about this service is that Austin will potentially be able to put people in touch with the person who will best fit what they are looking for. Hence, the land mobility service is not just for older farm-

ers, but any farmer or land owner interested in a collaborative arrangement. "It's just as important that I hear from people interested in these arrangements to drive on their farm business as well as those looking to take a step back," Austin said.

So, for a farmer or farm family operating independently, what arrangements offer potential?

Austin said: "Every farm is different so individual advice is needed. It could be long-term leasing, share farming, a partnership, etc. The

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person interested could be a farmer or land owner of any age contemplating any form of collaborative farming arrangement. If they get in touch with me, I will try and help them."

Austin feels that educating people and dispelling a lot of the myths and preconceptions about different arrangements is important. He said: "My one hope is that people engage with the service and explore the benefits. I will be attending plenty of Teagasc, IFA and other events and will be running workshops on the potential of these arrangements. If you are interested, get in touch with me and explore your options. The service is 100% confidential."

He continued: "A small misconception is often what is holding someone back. It's definitely a big step outside your comfort zone for anyone who has farmed on their own up to now, but if people were clearer on the benefits, I think we would see many

more people farming this way. If people decide that one of these farming arrangements is not for them, this should be because they understand how the arrangement will work and can clearly see the pros and cons."

Regardless of the arrangement a farmer or land owner decides on, Austin has a number of objectives he wants to achieve for both parties. These are:

➲ **Income security and enhancement:** A new arrangement must deliver a better income for both parties involved.

➲ **Title security:** Ownership of land will be in no way influenced by any arrangement. The objective is to get land used in a more productive way.

➲ **Continued family involvement:** Depending on the arrangement and desires of the people involved.

➲ **Farm development and added value:** Land being farmed well will not only deliver a higher profit for



Over the course of our 'Shared Passion, Better Future' series we will detail first-hand experience of land access issues including partnerships, leasing and transfer. These are extremely personal stories and we thank our featured farmers for sharing their experiences. If you have any similar stories or experiences you would like to share or queries you would like answered then please get in touch with us

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Austin Finn, Macra land mobility service manager.

"The next step is putting people in contact with someone who might suit them. It is up to individuals to decide if they want to work together but I will be there to make sure everyone is clear on the requirements and help to sort out any issues. I think a farmer or land owner often has someone in mind already that would suit — someone they see farming to a high standard themselves and think they would like to work with."

After an arrangement has been agreed on, Austin would envisage meeting each person separately. Then he would meet them together and, at this stage, the arrangement should be ready to begin. People will be expected to do their own work with accountants, etc, but Austin will be available to give guidance along the way.

Each arrangement will be set up with a clear exit mechanism for whenever it concludes. Austin said: "I have no doubt that some of these arrangements will develop into long-term relationships but some won't and that's not a problem. They are designed to benefit people while they are operating and it is very

simple to dissolve them." Ultimately, every new farming arrangement will result in increased agricultural productivity which is important for the Irish agricultural industry. But Austin sees the main benefit as what the programme can deliver at farm level.

**Improved quality of life and social benefits:** Reduced workload for those looking to take a step back and benefits of working with someone else.

**Tax efficiency:** Austin will help ensure that all arrangements are set up in as tax efficient way as possible.

#### Service

So, how exactly will the service work? Austin explained: "Firstly, get in touch. This part of the process is 100% confidential. I am creating a database of interested people.

"Once I have a group of 15 to 20 people in a general area, I plan to run a three-day options workshop for them. This will go through the different arrangements, make sure that people know the pros and cons of each and will also involve visiting a farm operating an arrangement.

It is hoped everyone will

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complete this step but if some people need one-to-one advice at the start, this can be arranged.

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"During the Shared Passion Better Future series, there were a number of excellent case studies highlighted. My job is to help other people capture these benefits. The CAP deal is now sorted until 2020 giving us stability. As an island, we have a fantastic farming industry and the core of this is the viability of farms. The land mobility service aims to improve farm viability and will deliver other social benefits to everyone involved also."

#### NEXT WEEK

Has sharemilking run out of steam in New Zealand?

## Q&A

### Who is funding this programme?

The FBD Trust, which funds industry good initiatives such as the sexed semen trial this spring, is the main sponsor after being approached by Macra. Others include Macra, IFA, Irish Farmers Journal, Teagasc, IFAC and DAFM. Aurivo, Dairygold and Glanbia have all decided to support the service as the pilot areas are in their catchments and they wish to make sure farmers in these areas benefit.

### What is the cost of the service?

Initially, the cost of the programme set-up is being covered by the FBD Trust and other stakeholders. A small brokerage fee when putting people in contact is to be decided on. An annual review fee of €250 per party will apply to people who get

established in new farming arrangements.

**What happens to my Single Farm Payment if I farm in one of these arrangements?** If you wish to stay farming in one of these arrangements, your Single Farm Payment will be unaffected.

### What if I am interested but am outside the initial pilot areas?

Still get in contact. Austin is initially operating the service on his own but if enough people in an area make enquiries, he hopes to run an options programme in this area and try and put like-minded people in contact.

### What is the long-term goal of the service?

To provide information and to educate. If an option doesn't suit someone now, it may still be something they would consider in the future. If enough interest is shown and if arrangements are created successfully in pilot areas, it is hoped that the programme will receive more funding and more people will be employed to offer the service nationwide.

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