

In each issue, we team up with FBD, the official sponsors of AG MAG, to visit farms across Ireland and share the stories, people, animals and produce that make them special.

ON A VISIT TO ...

NEWBARD

Next up on our AG MAG farm tour of Ireland, we headed back down south to Co. Waterford. We had been invited to Newbard Farm - a certified organic farm that sits on just under 50 acres of rolling countryside near Lismore. Standing at the gates to greet us were owners Siobhán and Ross Newcombe. We had a good feeling about this one!



The farm name - Newbard - is taken from Siobhán and Ross's two surnames, Newcombe and Hubbard. It started in 2015 with just a handful of pigs and a real curiosity about where food was coming from.



Ross told us how he came from a dairy farming background, so pigs were completely new territory.

'There was a lot of learning along the way - and plenty of mistakes too,' Ross assured us. And when the Newcombes started laughing, I had to ask more.

What surprised them most in those early weeks, they explained, was how quickly the pigs became the centre of everything.

'They've great personalities,' Siobhán explained, 'and once you start working with them, you're hooked.'



The Pigs

There are five full-time sows on the farm, and they all have names.

Bea is the oldest at eight years old. She's an Oxford Sandy & Black and has been with them from early on. The others are all pure Berkshire - Molly, Missy, Tik Tok and Tin Tin.

They've also bred their own boar, Danny, who's a Tamworth cross Oxford Sandy & Black, so there's a nice bit of history in the herd.

Newbard farm aims to produce between 160 and 200 pigs a year, depending on conditions like the weather and how the ground is holding up.



Alongside the pigs, they keep about 20 ewes, giving roughly 30 to 35 lambs a year, as well as Le Bresse chickens - a heritage, dual-purpose breed.

'You do get attached to them, especially the sows,' says Siobhán.

'They all have their own personalities - some are very calm, others a bit more mischievous - and that's a big part of what makes working with them so enjoyable.'



NEWBARD FARM



The famous newbard hog roast

A hog roast is exactly what it sounds like – a whole pig, slow-roasted over heat until the meat is tender and the crackling is just right. It's one of the favourite parts of what Newbard does, and it's a full-day process, sometimes two. The pig goes on from early morning and slow-cooks for eight to 12 hours.

There's great anticipation around it. People gather as the smell builds, and by the time it's ready there's usually a crowd waiting. People love seeing where the food has come from and how it's cooked, and you can really taste the difference with organic pork.

It's not just about the food. The hog roast becomes a focal point at events – whether it's a wedding, a party or a local gathering. It brings people together.

This side of the business helps support the farm, especially when times are difficult. Having different streams of income helps keep things going. Siobhán also works full-time outside the farm.

A mixed and sustainable Farm

Newbard is run as a mixed farm. Alongside the animals, they grow a range of vegetables through the seasons, using crop rotation to keep the soil healthy and productive.

They also use methods like the Three Sisters planting approach, which helps maximise yield while naturally feeding nitrogen back into the soil through the beans.

Pumpkins are an important crop at Newbard Farm. They're fed back to the pigs and help support gut health over the winter months, especially when other plants aren't available.

Alongside this, they grow kale and other greens, as well as potatoes, carrots, beetroot and peas.

For the Newcombes, it all comes back to keeping the system as self-sufficient and sustainable as possible. As Siobhán and Ross see it, everything starts with the soil – if the soil isn't right, nothing that comes from it will be.

The eggs are mainly for the farm and family at the moment, but this may change soon.



The Orchard & fruit

One of our favourite places to see during our visit that day was the small fruit garden on the farm. Siobhán was particularly proud of this and explained how they hope to expand it.

They also have access to a number of local orchards, which is especially useful in autumn.



When there's an abundance of apples around this time of the year, the pigs are the real winners as all are brought back and used as natural feed.

This aligns very much to the Newbard Farm philosophy - making use of what's available and avoiding waste. Not only that, the fruit garden and orchards support biodiversity and help wildlife throughout the seasons.



A normal day

A typical day at Newbard starts early, usually around 6.00 or 6.30 am. The first job is checking and feeding the animals.

After that, the work varies depending on the time of year - from moving fences and rotating stock to general maintenance.

'The best part of the day is being out with the animals, especially in the morning when everything is calm,' says Siobhán. 'You can really see them thriving in the system, and that makes it all worthwhile.'

The hardest part is juggling everything, especially alongside work outside the farm. The days can be long, and there's always something to be done, no matter the weather.



Why the Newcombes farm

When we sat down for a cup of tea in the early afternoon, we asked Siobhán and Ross why they chose to farm alongside their full-time jobs. And they replied that it was because they believe in producing real, honest food and knowing exactly where it comes from.

For the Newcombes, it's not just about food production. It's about nutrition, quality and the positive impact good food can have on people's health.

We could easily see that maintaining the connection between the land, the animals and the people eating the food - and being part of a local food system people can trust - was a real driving force.

Before we finished up, Siobhán offered some advice worth sharing. 'For anyone thinking about it,' she explained, 'start small, be prepared to learn and, maybe above all, don't be afraid of hard work. Running a mixed farm like ours is not easy, but it's very rewarding.'



Saying goodbye

Just before it was time to pack up and head home to the northwest, we took one last stroll around the Newbard Farm.

It felt like the pigs were even saying goodbye. And we were sorry to leave.

Back on the road, we chatted about what we saw that day - the farm, the animals, the Newcombes and their vision for the future. It was, we felt, a perfect farm to end our first season of AG MAG on.

One thing that really shone through was that Ross and Siobhán know what hard work is - but they also believe in what they're doing. And that's what real farming is about.

Next up for Newbard

The next step for Newbard Farm is a major one. Siobhán and Ross are part of a group of farmers working to develop a small-scale meat processing facility.

The project is funded by DAFM under the Short Food Chain Measure and grew from their own experience of producing high-quality organic animals while struggling to access local processing.

The aim is to create a facility that supports other farmers, offering a local and reliable option. It will shorten the food chain, reduce travel distances and keep more value within the local farming community.

Ross explained how it began with five farmers but has now grown to over 100, with support from local development companies, the BioRegion, Talamh Beo and other state bodies.