

FARM VISITS



On Tuesday 23rd May the Student Council Environment Committee visited two farms on the outskirts of Tralee. The thirty students firstly travelled to a large dairy farm and later on the same day they had a brief visit to an Organic farm.

The first part of the trip took us to Kilgulbin near Ardfer. We were welcomed to the home and farm of Maurice and Eva Costelloe for a wonderful and engaging few hours where we saw, first hand, the workings of a large scale dairy farm. The Costelloe's farm has a herd of over eight hundred animals with nearly five hundred milking cows.

Mr. Costelloe explained the workings of a modern dairy farm from beginning to the end of the 'milk cycle'. Basically, the students got to witness the arrival of the cows into the state of the art automated milking parlour and at the other end we saw the tanker from Lee Strand arrive to collect the milk. We were amazed to have a peek into the 24,000 litre milk tank, emptied by the tanker every day or two, we saw the milking parlour which had room for 50 cows on a rotating turntable, the cows walk on themselves and when finished they back themselves out and go on their way. We were taken to see the new arrivals, the young calves, in their sheds and we even had an encounter with the Bull.

Students learned that all the water, tens of thousands of litres, comes from wells on the farm, that the heat from the cooled milk gets transferred into the house for heating and hot water, that the automated milking parlour is capable of taking 50 cows at a time and that up to 24,000 litres of milk are produced for Lee Strand every day or two. What also impressed students is that all the cows could be milked in just under two hours. It was interesting to note that nearly all of the fodder for the farm comes from the locality and that the milking parlour was designed and manufactured up the road at Dairymaster in Causeway.

It was a real eye-opener and a pleasure to witness how a modern dairy farm operates. They even kept a few cows behind for our students to have a go at milking, which was a real treat...even if Lewis was on the receiving end of a 'bovine accident'...the shirt came out well in the wash!

We would like to thank Maurice, Eva and their family for their time and their hospitality during and after the visit. We were very taken aback by the tables of treats laid on by the family, a wonderful experience of good, old fashioned hospitality. Many of the students had never before been on a



Ian welcoming us to Gortbrac



Students in the central hub of the milking parlour



One of the students has a go at milking



Maurice Costelloe explaining how the milking system works

farm and we are sure that the day will stand out for them in their memories of school life.

After visiting Costelloe's farm we travelled to Gortbrac Organic farm for a very quick visit of about an hour. In Gortbrac, Ian McGrigor showed us around and we saw his poly tunnels growing everything from figs and nectarines to cabbages and potatoes. Ian then took us on a walk up the hill on the old bog road where students saw two of our indigenous carnivorous plants the Butterworth and the Sundew and in the meadow we also saw a proliferation of pyramid orchids. Students sat by the lake which is used to water the poly tunnels as well as providing water for the toilets. Sadly we had to return quickly to the school but it is hoped that we will have a longer visit in September.



Students by the lake

Student Climate Conference



On Wednesday, the 10th of May over 80 students from five second level schools in Tralee met for a conference to discuss, debate and take action on climate issues.

The conference took place at Mercy Secondary School Mounthawk and brought together students from Mercy Mounthawk, Tralee CBS, Presentation Secondary School Tralee, Coláiste Gleann Lí and Gaelcholáiste Trá Lí. During the course of the event students, working in groups, discussed the effects of climate change under the headings of Energy, Transport, Global Food Systems, Biodiversity, Water, Litter and Climate Justice.



Each of the working groups comprised students from the five secondary schools and throughout the course of the conference the groups adopted resolutions and devised action ideas which will be carried out by the schools going forward into next year.

The action ideas included the following proposals from the school students: sensor taps to reduce waste water to be installed in schools, food miles on canteen food menus should be displayed in the school canteens and school canteens should promote vegan or vegetarian food at least one day per week. Students will be involved with school authorities and parents to help devise tasty, nutritious and meat-free meals.

All litter in the schools should be segregated and disposed of sustainably. The climate justice committee proposed that schools should have a climate justice week to raise awareness of the fact that it is the poorer nations and peoples of the



world that will, in the short and medium terms, bear the brunt of climate change. It is felt that wealthier nations should help these countries in mitigating the effects of climate change.

The energy group proposed the idea that all schools should have a blackout day every week or every month. During blackout day lights in the school would be turned off and an increased awareness of energy usage would be promoted. The action projects will be carried out in the individual schools who will decide themselves which areas of the environment to focus on through the action projects.

At the end of the day the conference agreed that all schools in Tralee should carry out and promote two action projects together. The first of these, it is proposed, would be a blackout day across all schools in the town. The second of the action projects involves the area of transport. All students present felt that promoting cycling and walking to school is something that the schools in town could achieve together. It was recognised by the conference that many students who have bicycles do not cycle to school and it was felt that, if promoted properly, many more students would get on their bikes or walk to school instead of getting lifts in cars.

At the end of the day it was agreed among all present that schools would reconvene in September to devise a safe and workable action project around the area of safe cycling and walking to school. It was felt that the promotion of sustainable transport to schools, namely walking and cycling, would not only enhance the environment, but would also increase the well-being and engagement of students after they got to school in the mornings.

After four hours of intense discussion and presentations, the conference came to an end, with the aim to meet again in September to plan what to do next. It is hoped that the student climate conference will become an annual event and that all students in town will work together to achieve success in changing habits of students, teachers and parents when it comes to the environmental and lifestyle issues that affect us all.

