

# Nurturing nature



Grass fuels our business. It is the natural, sustainable resource that feeds our cattle.

This makes sense as the British Isles sit at a latitude of 53 degrees north – the Golden zone for growing grass. In fact, the British Isles have the longest grass-growing season in Europe thanks to plentiful rain and a moderate temperature.

This all goes to making our business a success and our beef award winning – high in vitamins and minerals, low in saturated fat and always ultra tender.

Nature sustains our business, so we are making it our business to sustain nature.

At ABP, biodiversity and our agricultural business are explicitly linked. The provision of biodiversity corridors links the agricultural hinterland and our processing facilities with a nurture-nature programme.

Typically, our sites are situated in rural or semi-rural locations which neighbour agricultural land. While many farmers engage with biodiversity; the agricultural sector doesn't necessarily promote biodiversity. Monocultures, pesticides and fertilisers all have an impact on native wildlife and woodland.

We are developing biodiversity corridors at several of our sites to protect our natural environment. These corridors will cover over 20 hectares, the equivalent of 50 football pitches.

We've taken our lead from nature. By using what we have and not changing the ecosystem, we can find ways to improve the natural habitat and promote biodiversity. With this approach we can support a variety of ecosystems including woodland, wetland and semi-wetland, ponds and meadows.

Wetlands are an important ecosystem in Ireland with over 600,000 hectares. However, they are under threat and decreasing rapidly – 10% were lost between 1990 and 2006.

ABP Rathkeale was already surrounded by semi-wetland which attracted various fowl including moorhens, coots and ducks. We are currently enhancing the existing wetland while also introducing an on-site pond and pasture.

The wetlands at ABP Rathkeale and many other sites will attract a wide variety of species from natterjack toads and smooth newts to orange-tipped butterflies and damselflies.

Ireland is one of the most deforested countries in Europe with only a small proportion of native woodland - 85,000 hectares. This tends to be restricted to small areas.

We are also introducing woodland areas at our sites. These woodlands have been planted with native species such as ash, oak, birch and alder.

We hope these woodlands will attract a wide variety of birds including finches and swifts; animals such as hedgehogs and squirrels; and insects like bees and butterflies.

Biodiversity conservation and agricultural development are co-dependent. At the genetic, species and farming systems levels, biodiversity provides valuable ecosystem services and functions for agricultural production. It is the connection between raising the productivity of crops and livestock while safeguarding niches of the environment.

It is our biodiversity corridors which will enable agricultural systems to become more intense without losing out on biodiversity. We hope these biodiversity corridors will have a real and positive impact on our local environment.

