When 140+ countries demand dairy from Ireland, what impact does that have locally?

17,000+ family-owned dairy farms

8.8 billion liters of milk produced in 2025

1.6 million dairy cows

€7.3 billion in exports in 2025, up 86% since 2016

WHY NOW

Global demand for animal source protein is projected to grow 20% per capita by 2050. Ireland, producing some of the lowest-emission dairy on earth and doing so efficiently, is one of the few places positioned to meet that demand responsibly. In fact, Ireland exports about 90% of the dairy it produces, playing an outsized role in providing a growing world with a consistent supply of one of the most nutrient-dense sources of protein.

The Pasture Paradox takes an inside look at Ireland's pasture-based dairy landscape, a global model for sustainable production, as producers work to meet growing demand for grass-fed dairy while protecting the land and water they depend on.

The Pasture Paradox is a companion mini-documentary produced by the filmmakers of World Without Cows, a feature-length documentary that examines the cultural and economic significance of cows, their role in feeding the world and their impact on climate.

BIG PICTURE

As our global population climbs toward 10 billion, simply feeding the world is not enough. One in four children globally already face malnutrition. We don't just need more food — we need to produce more nutrient-dense sources of protein, and to do more responsibly and efficiently.

- **80% of people regularly consume dairy**
  Meeting this demand depends on export-driven systems like Ireland's, where 90% of dairy produced is for global markets.
- **673M metric tons of fluid cow milk produced globally in 2024**
  Ireland accounts for less than 1% of that, yet supplies dairy products to 140+ countries.

SYSTEM

Ireland is not a niche producer. It is a high-performing, export-driven system operating at global scale — powered not by size, but by its environment and pasture-based production.

- **~1,200** mm of rain annually
- **240** days a year, cows graze outdoors
- **95%** of their diet is grass
- **One of the lowest** carbon footprints per liter of milk globally

TENSION

Keeping Ireland's pastures productive requires nutrients — the same nutrients that, if not carefully managed, run into rivers and waterways.

- **44%** of monitored river sites have nitrate concentrations above levels associated with healthy aquatic ecosystems. Nutrient runoff from fertilizers required to sustain Ireland's pasture-based dairy system is one contributing factor to this.
- EPA monitoring shows signs of progress, with about a **10%** reduction in river nitrate levels in 2024.
- **€1B+** in annual export revenue is at stake if the nitrates derogation is lost – the derogation stipulates how much nitrogen can be used by farmers per acre.

Ireland's global dairy reputation was built collectively, and its commitment to the environment is no different.

The Pasture Paradox dives into the opportunities, but also the potential constraints facing Irish dairy producers. With insights from those at the forefront of production — from farmers to processors, researchers and regulators — the mini-documentary shines a light on the realities facing global agriculture, and what the future might hold.

GET INVOLVED

- Share World Without Cows Ireland: The Pasture Paradox with your team, your partners and your community to continue the conversation.
- Be among the first 1,000 screenings of the final cut of the complete World Without Cows documentary, releasing globally midyear.
- Visit worldwithoutcows.com/explore for more resources.
- Tag us on social media (@WorldWithoutCows) and use #WorldWithoutCows.
- Sign up for our newsletter to stay connected.

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