‘Smart farmers’ adjust to challenges of climate change

New technologies and more efficient work practices are changing how farmers operate

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Harold Kingston, who runs a dairy farm in Courtmacsherry, Co Cork, with 160 cattle, is typical of the new generation of smart farmers, who have adjusted how they work in response to climate change.

With the use of genetic technologies his operation is more efficient in generating milk with the right profile, ie better “solids” content, which is used for cheesemaking. This comes with the benefit of using smaller animals, requiring less feed and generating reduced carbon emissions.

Mr Kingston recently put money into ensuring cattle have optimal water consumption. Smart farming involves more efficient use of machinery and energy consumption, which makes the operation more profitable.

He is critical of studies that concentrate on emissions from agriculture and do not take into account how technology is changing farming.
**Livestock**

If Ireland can show the world how best to produce livestock from a carbon point of view, “we can assume a global leadership position as sustainable producers of food”.

There is no simple solution to ensuring an adequate food supply for the world, he says, as a move away from grass-based dairying and beef production inevitably requires more ploughing, which generates more emissions.

A former IFA environment committee chairman, Mr Kingston highlights EPA greenhouse gas figures as “proof of the [Irish] agri-food sector’s carbon-efficient growth” with emissions declining since 1990, while exports from the sector have grown significantly.

He says he has learned to be more constructive talking to farmers on how to tackle climate change, advising them how they can save money while protecting the environment.