

Damiens Diary  
Farmers Journal  
22nd September 2011

Its just gone 10.30am local time. I am on a coach travelling from Niagra Falls to Toronto. As I look out the window, my thoughts are on Croke Park where the ball is being thrown in around now in the All Ireland final. The coach is quiet. It's a million miles from the hysteria of Croker. This is the first All Ireland final I have missed in many years but I have good reason.

For the past week, I have been attending the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists world congress. Yes there is such an organisation. In fact over three hundred agricultural journalists from thirty one countries were here this week. We visited many farms in the greater Ontario region. We listened to many speakers from different farm related organisations and we exchanged views and opinions on all matters to do with agriculture and journalism.

And I leave here content that we as communicators have a very important role to play over the coming years in relaying the message of farming and food production to a broad audience.

But that is easier said than done. You travel to a conference like this and you meet fellow journalists from all over the globe including Madagascar, The Congo, Japan and Peru and we all have so much in common when it comes to the job of reporting on farming matters. And that is the fight to be relevant.

Ireland is a farming nation and relative to other countries, farming stories are very well covered here. It is too important to the economy to be ignored. In other countries though, I learned this week that farming and agriculture is viewed almost with contempt and it leaves the agriculture media in those countries in a bit of a bind.

Journalists should not be flag wavers for anybody but agri journalists tend to be made look like that simply because of the frustration in trying to convince editors of the relevance and importance of covering farming matters. Its hard to fathom the resentment although one British journalist explained that this feeds off government policy which is apathetic at best towards agriculture. A Norwegian journalist told me that it just doesn't matter in their oil rich economy. On the flipside in Australia, there is a

very strong agriculture media with one ABC radio programme on farming going out at 12 noon every day as it has done for many decades.

The public are interested and I can vouch for that by virtue of the high listenership we have to CountryWide on Saturdays which now stands at above 200,000. We have had to take the hard edge off some of the stories so as to make it an easier listen for ordinary consumers but it has worked.

Ear to the Ground has become one of the longest running factual TV programmes in Europe. This newspaper continues to buck the trend with regards to newspaper circulation and Countryfile on BBC is among the top most watched TV programmes in the UK every week. So why don't more high brow decision makers in the media and politics take notice of these figures? If its all about bums on seats, then they have nothing to worry about in giving vent to agriculture alongside popular culture.

Farming fell off the media agenda during the economic boom. Its time that people realised it's one of the few shows left in town.

As I arrive at Pearson International airport, news has reached me of a famous Dublin win back at Croker. That's one story which will have no problem commanding column inches.

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