

The IFA and Farming in Peterswell

By Michael Coleman and Pat Lahiff

The first farmers' meeting ever held in Peterswell was held on 1st December 1950, under the name of the Young Farmers Club. Guest speaker was local agriculture inspector, Michael Lucitt. Officers elected were:

President:	Fr. Hehir PP
Chairman:	Fr. Larkin
Treasure:	John Redmond Glennon
Joint Secretaries:	Toddy Lahiff and Eamonn Skehill

Regular meetings were held up to 1955. In that year the National Farmers Association (NFA) was founded. Peterswell's first officers of the NFA were:

President:	Fr. Larkin PP
Vice President:	Sean O'Donnell
Chairman:	Michael Moloney
Vice Chairman:	John Finn
Treasurer:	John Redmond Glennon
Secretary:	Christy Farrell.

24 members attended this meeting

At the AGM of 1957, it was decided to join with other branches to send pigs to the factory:

John Cunningham agreed to send 4 pigs

Michael Coleman agreed to send 1 pig

John Redmond Glennon agreed to send 1 pig

It was also decided to hold a dance to raise funds. Four shillings admission fee was agreed.

In the early days of the NFA, the Peterswell branch was very active in getting quotations for fertilizer, gates, feedstuffs, seed potatoes, grass seeds etc for its members.

In those years, farmers had to pay rates on their land. It was always a very controversial issue. Some of the poorer land of the county had a much

higher valuation than some of the better land. There was a regular increase in the rates, much to the dismay of the NFA. Rates on land were done away with some time in the mid-seventies.

In the 50's and 60's, Peterswell NFA had between 46-62 members. The NFA in Peterswell played its part in setting up the new mart in Gort and the pig station in Cloon.

Peterswell NFA held a fundraising dance in Labane in February 1965. Profit on the night was £25-40-1p, about €32 in today's money - it would not go far today! A raffle was held on the night. Tickets were 3p each or 5 for 1 shilling. Profit from the raffle was £5-11-2p.

When it came to farming, Peterswell could always compete with the best and this was proved in the late '60's when John Cunningham and Tom Healy won prizes regularly at the Gort mart shows. The competition was very strong in those days with cattle coming from all over Clare and Galway. These cups were filled in the local pubs, causing sore heads the next morning!

In 1966, the NFA decided that the farmers of Ireland should stand up for their rights. The Farmers Rights Campaign was started under President Richard Deasy. Groups of farmers from every county in Ireland walked to Dublin. Peterswell NFA had a representative in the Galway contingent in Brendan Flannery. It took one week to complete the journey, walking 18-20 miles per day. A rally was held in Dublin on the day, the walkers reached the capital. A bus left Peterswell crossroads at 7am with Michael Coleman, Jimmy Larkin, Mick Joe Leary, Michael Callinan, Paul Healy, Joe Kelleher, Patrick Farrell, Michael Joe Finn and Tommie Fahey on board. Those years were hard years in farming.

In 1976, the name was changed from the National Farmers Association to the Irish Farmers Association. In the '70's Peterswell had around 66 members.

Like every other area, farming has changed a lot in Peterswell since the '50's. Now there are very few full time farmers left. In the '50's, there were very few cars around and only a few phones. But most farmhouses were self-sufficient. They grew their own potatoes, vegetables and corn; made their own bread and butter, had their own eggs and some were able to sell eggs and butter. Some reared geese and turkeys and some killed a pig or two in the year.

In the '60's and '70's, nearly every farmer was supplying milk to the creamery; now there are only four dairy farmers left in the parish. Nearly every farmer was sowing a lot of tillage of some sort or another; there is very little tillage sown in the parish now.

The late John Cunningham was Chairman for ten consecutive years from 1958 – 1968. Michael Coleman was Secretary for eight consecutive years from 1961 – 1969. These were the longest serving officers of the Peterswell Branch.

The other people who held the main officerships of the branch down through the years were: John Redmond Glennon, Christy Farrell, John Mulcair, Toddy Lahiff, P.J. Larkin, Michael Joe Finn, Tom Healy, Brendan Flannery, Pat Lahiff, Jack Lynskey, Michael Callinan, Patrick Fitzgerald, Michael Morgan, Eugene Glynn, Paul Sherry, Gerard Keely, Tom Devine and Dennis Farrell. The present officers are:

Chairman:	Patrick Fitzgerald
Vice Chairman:	Paul Sherry
Secretary:	Gerard Keely
Treasurer:	Pat Lahiff
Registrar:	Francis Walshe

In recent years, membership of Peterswell IFA is around 35-42.

To all those members who have passed away, May the Lord reward them for their hard work

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